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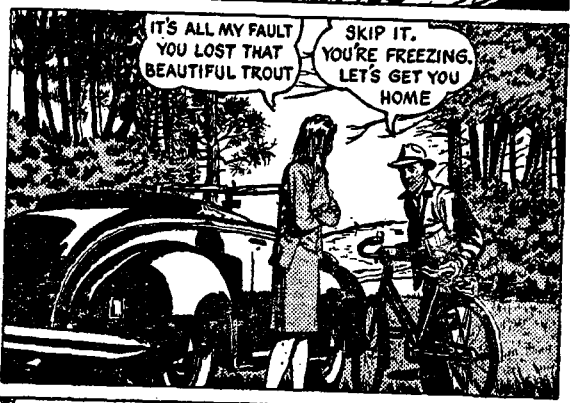

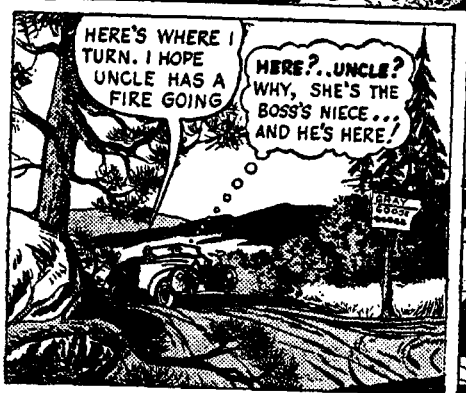

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VOL. 8 AUGUST, 1947 No. 6

Book-Length Novel

Minimum Man, or, Time to Be Gone **Andrew Marvell** **6**

Unseen, silent, they marched to their terrible rendezvous with Destiny—the little men of Harwich who had vowed to destroy the world!

Short Story

Boomerang **George Whitley** **114**

They tore the veil of mystery that had hidden the ancient secret of the Queen of Night, and found the answer to whether her pale smile had promised Life—or ruthless Death. . . .

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Masters of Fantasy **Neil Austin** **113**

Howard Phillips Lovecraft—"The Outsider."

The Readers' Viewpoint **119**

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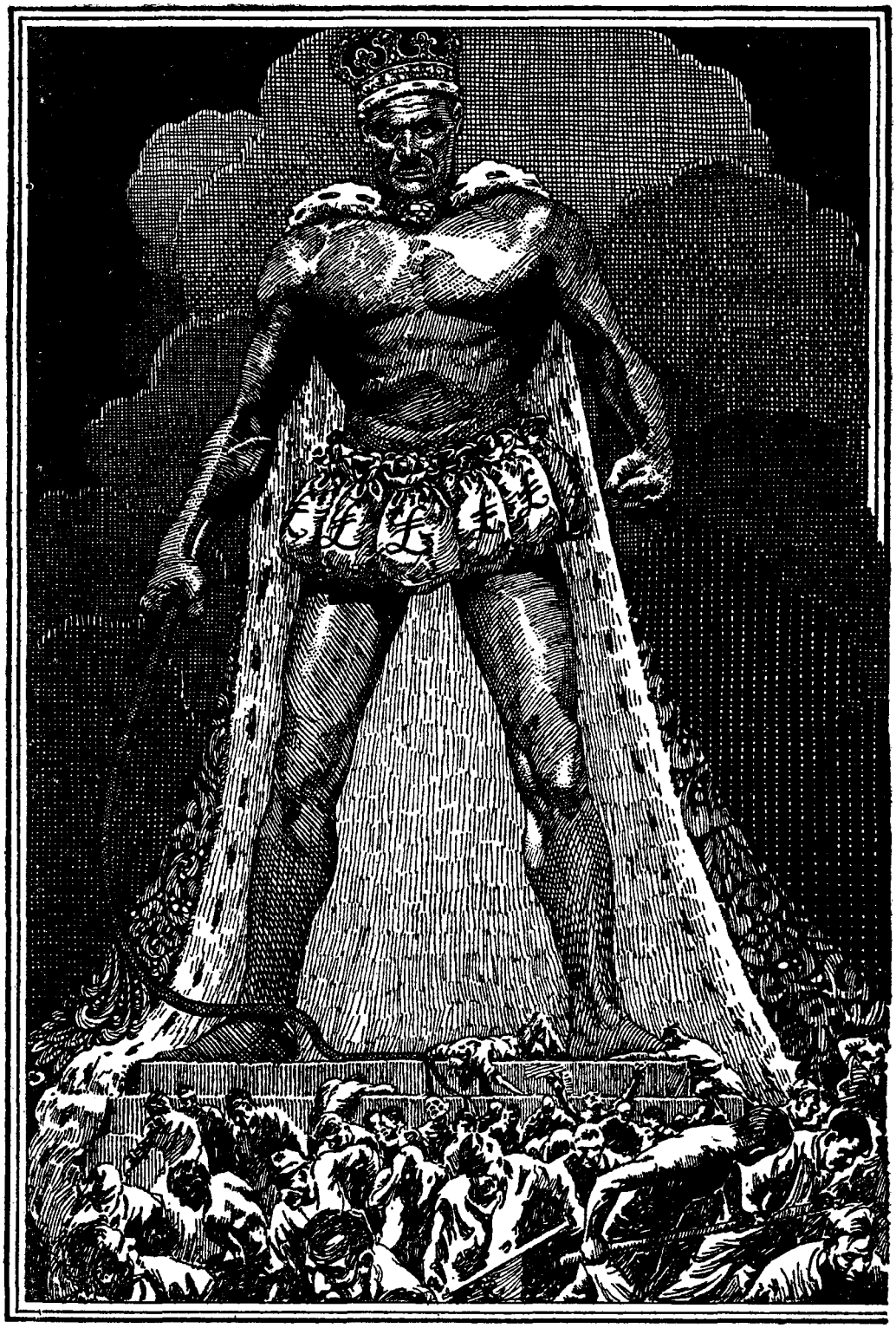

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Unseen, silent, they marched to their terrible rendezvous with Destiny—the little men of Harwich who had vowed to destroy the world!

MINIMUM MAN
or TIME TO BE GONE

By Andrew Marvell

FOREWORD

THIS is the story of the coming of Minimum Man. It is, also, incidentally, the story of the counter-revolution of nineteen fifty. So much myth and so many legends have gathered round the plain facts that it is high time they were put soberly to paper. My credentials for writing the inner story of both events will, I think, not be challenged. I was the third person in this country to meet Solomon. It was I who telephoned the now famous "Statement" to the Press, and it was I who brought Solomon in touch with Gregory and put in Gregory's hand that instrument without which the counter-revolution must have ended in fiasco.

When Jellaby sprang his coup upon us in that bitter cold February of 1950 I was

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a crime reporter on the *Evening Messenger*. We of the trade have our eyes skinned and our ears to every keyhole. We see and hear most things, but there was not a man in Fleet Street—apart from the proprietors—who was not caught napping. The revolution was, to me as to so many others, a bolt from the blue.

Most of us had heard of Jellaby, and forgotten him. Mosley's group fizzled out in the early forties. I believe that the first mention of its successor, Jellaby's Party of New Freedom, was in the *Daily Mail* some time in the autumn of 1945. I covered one or two of its meetings, but nothing seemed to come of it. By 1947 all trace of it had disappeared. That useful fiction, the Average Englishman, congratulated himself on being well rid of the Fascist bogey, and turned his attention to the increasingly bitter tussle between the traditional parties. He could appreciate and enjoy that. Fascism receded into a dementia which infected foreigners. England, thank God, was free of trans-Channel isms. Labour versus Tory, that was essentially an English game, played according to accepted rules.

In the foulest election in our annals (and the fouler it is, the better the fun), Labour came into power with a clear majority in November 1949. This time, as the country realized, Labour meant action, and we sat back, agitated or complacent as the case might be, to watch developments.

I have searched the British Press for a single reference to Jellaby and his party of New Freedom during the interval between the election and the Revolution. There is not one. For Jellaby had profited by the experience of the French cagoulards. He was working in secret. He was not challenging democracy in broad daylight. He was undermining it in the cellars. There were no processions, no speeches, no special pleading in the newspapers, no propaganda whatsoever.

Jellaby sapped at people's fears in private. His agents were everywhere, calling up executives in offices, dining with this man and that behind palms in quiet restaurants, coming to arrangements on secluded golf courses. And he did not make a single mistake. Of all the people he approached not one protested in public. There may have been letters written to the Press, but if so, they were not printed. For Jellaby had made a fine study of power in the modern state. He knew where the power lay, and he was after the "key" men only.

WHEN his moment came he was sure of victory. The police were in his hands, the army, the navy, the air force, and the broadcasting stations. There never was such a quiet revolution. When he marched his hundred men to Downing Street and captured the Cabinet, there was not a finger raised to prevent him. Within ten minutes he was master of the land.

The Commons were dissolved. Rule was by Council, and the Council meant Jellaby. The very next day the police were armed. It was a new sight for Englishmen, to see the yellow holster swinging at their belts. Jellaby's portrait ran like an infection through the country. It was impossible to avoid. The stupid face—its brow made higher, its chin emphasized, the eyes given point—stared from every hoarding. Everyone saluted everything, Jellaby's portrait, soldiers marching, the Cenotaph, and the red white and blue flag on the official motor cars.

Almost at once the New Freedom curriculum was put into force at the schools, and history reverted to a bloody chronicle of England's greatness, an infant's storybook of triumphant militarism, with a few light touches by way of burning cakes and Canute by the seaside. (I still have a copy of that English history, written by Tinker, the Minister of Education, for the use of schools. In that book, when Canute ordered the waves to recede, *they obeyed*. Not a single teacher protested, and no man laughed. The Press, muzzled, still managed to emit an under-pressure jet of acrid nationalistic spittle. A new school of jingoist poets sprang up overnight. A Newcastle railway porter was its chief ornament. Youth bands drilled and marched and dislocated traffic, and made morning hideous in the suburbs. It did not matter. They went swinging along, their faces lifted in ecstasy, chanting the New Freedom song, "England, My England." England was made to rhyme with "wingland," as if, at last, it were soaring free of the azure main whence it had (according to the old song) arisen.

Every aspect of life was hitched on to the party propaganda. It invaded the Press, the wireless, the pulpit, the sports ground, the lecture room, and even the hospital. Never was there such a spate of speech. I have a mental impression of speech unlimited, of men gesturing, of hoarse exhortations at each street corner. England was frothing at the mouth.

The Trade Union Movement was dissolved. In its place we were urged to asso-

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ciate ourselves in mystical brotherhoods, in which the rich were to lie down with the poor.

A meeting of such a brotherhood in Fleet Street began to supplant the National Union of Journalists. A young, yellow-haired clerk from Lloyd's addressed us on the ineffable sweetness of life. "Get together," he shouted, "get together." Our English natures were abashed and shamed to a mute embarrassment. Then old Bill Walters got up and roared: "Are we to embrace or what?" But Bill disappeared next day.

And there were the concentration camps. Everyone knew of them. There was one at Salisbury, near Stonehenge. There was another in the Fens, and two on the moorlands of Northumberland. The Labour leaders were there to a man, those of the intellectuals who had not been quick enough on the parallel bars, and not a few diehard tories. These renegades amongst the privileged were people who had taken their history too seriously. They still babbled of constitutionalism and preferred the old freedom to the new.

It is only those who have read the tales of conscientious objectors during the Great War who will believe Englishmen capable of the bestial maltreatment meted out to prisoners in those camps. A mild-mannered little accountancy clerk posted to Salisbury discovered a vein of sadism and truculence in his nature, and worked it so successfully that within a month he was in charge. He is in a lunatic asylum now, but there are five hundred men who will see him in their nightmares until they are dead.

The country was stunned. Now and then a working man—it was nearly always a working man—would fail to salute. The bludgeons would descend upon his head, and for a time there was a heap on the pavement which passers-by avoided, their eyes elsewhere. Drunks—they were said to be drunks—would lift up their protesting voices in the street, only to be swept away and not seen any more. Members of the Party of New Freedom sat, arms folded, in the churches, in lecture rooms, wherever there was a public assembly, and woe betide the cleric or the layman who was not conformity itself.

I managed to survive the inquisition into my past life and opinions by the Press Commissioner, and was duly inscribed upon the Register of Journalists. I went on reporting the few crimes we were still allowed to report. They were not many. There were, in fact, more murders than ever before, but few of them were investigated, and for a very good reason.

It is against that background, lest the reader should have forgotten, that this story is unfolded.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS the middle of September I was sacked. I did not know that the editor was a friend of the jerry builder, or I would not have written the paragraph. It was about an estate in the suburbs which started collapsing before it was completely built; and how one of the original tenants, with rain coming in through the roof and damp creeping up the walls and doors hanging askew, had put out a notice: *Show House*, with the result that fifty disintegrating houses were unlettable.

It appeared in the "Diary" for the lunch edition on Wednesday. It had disappeared in the three o'clock edition. Something innocuous about a duchess had taken its place. I was back in the office by four. Soon after, one of those self-important, snub-nosed copy kids which swarm in evening newspaper offices, put in a head at the door and yelled: "Mr. Swan to see the editor."

I went along the corridor to see the old man's room. It does not matter how often you are sacked, it always gets you. I had been sacked from pretty nearly every office in Fleet Street, one time or another, but I suffered from the same creepy thrill: I had the same difficulty of not gulping and swallowing and reddening. I was struck by the same insensate desire, at one moment to flare up and be rude, at another to fawn and eat humble pie.

The editor went on writing while I stood in front of his desk. He went on writing for some time. It was the old trick of throwing a man off his balance, of inflicting the last humiliation. I looked down on his wicked, knowledgeable, bold and kinked skull, and wondered just how he was going to do it. There are so many ways. . . .

The old man stopped writing and looked up suddenly, with a glint of malice in his eye. "You are getting too old for a reporter" is what it meant. "I doubt whether you'll get another chance."

He held out a slip of paper and said frigidly, "Will you be good enough to see the cashier?"

"Thank you," I said, and left the room.

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It was the tamest of all my sackings.

I drew my month's money in lieu of notice and without saying good-bye to any of my colleagues turned into the Fleet Street Lyons for a coffee. I had to do some thinking.

They were the same stale treadmill of thoughts I knew so well. Always when I was sacked I swore I would write a book, but I knew by now the book would never be written. Then I toyed a little with short story writing, but experience had taught me that it was not my line. I fell back reluctantly on free-lancing—news and articles. And as a last resort considered the possibility of yet another shot at reporting. A haircut and a shave and a massage might temporarily blind an editor to my age, and get me on a payroll again. I was thirty-eight then.

But before I fell back upon that I would try my hand at free-lancing. There is a peculiar attraction in that for a newsman. There is the grandeur of being your own boss, the freedom to take a holiday when you want one and, of course, the universal belief that news editors miss everything that really matters. I had been getting fourteen pounds a week from my paper. Surely it should not be impossible to churn out ten a week on my own? I did not want to be sacked again. It was getting dangerous. One of these days I would find myself out for good, and too set in my ways to learn a new job.

Then I remembered something. It would do to start with. I would write it up for one of the morning papers.

It gave me a sweet taste in the mouth to think that it was the sort of story the old man would have liked. A neat little "exclusive."

I had been sent up to Highgate that afternoon to report a function, and had taken my car, a small, second-hand affair which I managed to run on the weekly expenses given a reporter. I took the back way up from King's Cross, a clear run over a ragged road and through some pretty poor streets. The route is dirty. It is unkempt. The road swerves and dips until, beyond a waterworks set on a hill, one glimpses the green of Parliament Hill fields through the gaps in the tall houses on the left. Away on the crest of Highgate Village is the sharp needle of its church, and somewhat below, to the right, the green onion dome of the Catholic church. It is all very strange, a bad, unreal dream with good patches.

The murderous old five-pound Standard was running well. I breasted a hill with a long shuddering grind of second gear and came to the summit. And there, parked against the wall which holds the waterworks, a van was drawn up, with a policeman standing by.

Call it what you will, intuition, instinct, a nose for news, but I pulled up behind and got out. The policeman turned towards me and stared at the car. Not many are left of that vintage.

He grinned. I grinned. He looked pre-Revolution to me.

"If you were to run over that," I said, pointing to the car, "it would make a nice packet of charges, what with brakes, light dipping, wind-screen wiper, and what not."

He gave a non-committal grunt. It wasn't his job, anyway.

"And what's this?" I asked.

"Smash," he said.

I had not noticed it before, but the off left front wheel was down. A tire burst, no doubt. It was dented, too, and a heavy score on the limestone wall showed where it had hit.

Well, there was nothing in that. It was an ordinary enough accident. But some devil would not let me alone.

"Happened long?" I asked.

"'Bout five this morning," he said.

I began to wonder. It was half-past two. Policemen are not set to guard broken vans from nearly morning until the afternoon.

I walked round the back and tried the door.

"Here!" said the bobby, sharply.

One is not a reporter for nothing, after all.

"Odd business this," I murmured. "Looks fishy to me."

"Fishy it is," he admitted. He was obviously bursting with news.

"Where's the driver?"

"Ah!" said the man in blue.

"Work in a garage myself," I said, risking it. "Not far from here. Might be something in it for me."

And I slipped him two shillings.

"Can't you find the driver?" I asked.

"He skipped it, first thing. Have a look at those number plates, mate. Bogus."

"You mean you can't trace the van?"

"Not a hope," he said.

Then he looked at me. It was obviously not all. There was something else, and he was thawing. Two bob, after all, is two bob, even to a policeman.

"Come here," he said, mysteriously.

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WE WENT round to the back and he opened the door. I peered inside, the policeman's head almost touching mine. Shelves had been fitted up both sides of the van, and along the front. There were three tiers running all the way round. Strips of wood had been nailed on the inward, or van side of each shelf so that anything placed on the shelf would not roll out. There were really a set of tiny bunks, like the sleepers on Pullman cars. The parallel was strengthened by the fact that each bunk was filled with cotton wool, quite clean cotton wool.

"Well!" I said. I was really surprised. The policeman said nothing, but looked triumphant, like an amateur conjurer when his trick has come off.

"Beds, that's what they are," I started experimentally.

"They do look like it, don't they?"

"What does the Yard make of it?" I asked, beginning to pump.

"They been here and gone over it with a tooth comb, but no go," he admitted ruefully. "It beat them, and it beats me. I can't make head nor tails of it. Mean to say," he took off his helmet and passed a hand over his brow, "what the hell would a man keep on a shelf like that?"

It beat me, too. But I was getting interested. There was more behind this smash than appeared. The Yard doesn't come and run over vans left in the streets unless it is for a good reason.

"Don't suppose anybody saw it?" I asked.

"Plenty heard the smash, and we've got one fellow saw it. He was cycling along to work at a factory down King's Cross way. He heard a loud report and bang went the van into the wall."

"Tire burst," I said, moving round to the front and giving the wheel a professional prod with my toe. "Well, what then?"

The policeman looked round before answering.

"Rats," he said.

"Rats!"

"So he says. The back door flew open and rats ran squealing out. All over the place. So *he* says. And the driver, a big fellow with a muffler round his neck, ran limping round the corner."

"Followed by the rats, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"No, really?"

"So he says."

"But, look here, it wasn't light at five."

"He pulled up about twenty yards away, behind there. Didn't want to get in trouble, naturally. Of course it wasn't light, and the street is badly lit, but that's what he says he saw. If you ask me. . . ."

There was a slight rustle above our heads and a man appeared on the grass banking between the wall and the water-reservoir. An official, obviously, with a bowler hat and glasses winking in his eyes.

"When are they taking it away, officer?" he asked.

"Don't know, sir." The policeman's manner became stiff and formal.

"Let me know when they come," said the man, and his head disappeared below the grass.

The spell was broken. There was no more to be learned here. The policeman's eye told me frankly that two bob could go a certain way but no further. I got into the car and after some trouble started it up. We roared round the corner.

There I pulled up again. I wanted to see over the wall. It would be difficult, for one cannot climb the walls of waterworks in broad daylight, not even in London, where people concern themselves less with the eccentricities of their neighbors than anywhere else in the world. The houses on the other side overlooked the reservoir, but how could one gain entry?

A fly-blown placard, *Room to Let,* hanging askew in a window smothered with lace curtains and aspidistra gave me an idea. I rang the bell, praying that it would not be a ground floor room. After a short wait a plaintive, sweet old lady appeared with a mild query in her eye.

"Could I . . . er . . . see your room, please?"

"Will you come in?" she breathed so quietly that I could hardly hear.

"I hope it is a front room," I said.

"Pardon?" she whispered. "I am a little deaf." And she cupped her ear.

"A front room, I suppose?" I said loudly.

"It looks out on the Heath," she said quietly. "Such a nice view it is. The last gentleman used to sit in the window for hours, looking out. He said they were the nicest sunsets in London. Such a kind gentleman he was."

A room looking out on the Heath would not help me, but I steeled myself to have a look at it. It was surprisingly good, in its way. And one could actually see the Heath.

"Haven't you one looking out on the road?" I asked.

"So noisy," said the deaf dame deprecatingly.

"I like noise," I shouted.

"So do I," she said in her soft whisper.

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"One can hear so much better, you know."

But we were not getting any further. I suggested—if anything yelled can be called a suggestion—that one of the front rooms might be coming vacant soon, and that it might save me a journey to have a look at it now.

"Eighteen years the lady has been with me . . ." she began, but brazenly, I opened the door across the corridor and stepped in. The old dame followed meekly.

"Such a lovely room," I shouted. "A good view over the reservoir, I see," and moved to the window.

There was my man of the glasses and bowler hat talking to a group of men in the uniform of the Metropolitan Water Board. They had sticks in their hands.

"Hallo, what's happening there?" I asked, pointing to the group.

"That man will be from the Council," she said. "There's been such a to-do here today, although I don't know why, to be sure. I saw the water testers here this morning, and then the rat catchers. People have been coming and going all day."

The old lady followed me meekly downstairs again. She was sweet and plaintive to the last, and closed the door behind me most gently and apologetically.

And that was that. I got into the car, went up to Highgate, telephoned a stick about the function, and returned to the office.

But now, thinking the affair over, I could see possibilities. The business was mysterious even to a tough reporter who was always using the word and never meeting the reality. It was menacing, in a tangled, lopsided way. The customary claptrap of the profession floated through my mind. Bubonic? No, not that. Bubonic was flea borne, wasn't it? It could not be carried by water. Still, no need to be precise over details. Poisoned reservoir would be better, perhaps. Vague headline scraps came and went. That business of the rats cascading after the man. *Pied Piper of Highgate.* . . . Anyway, it was a good story, the right sort of story for tired city clerks on the homing train, with plenty of loose ends for imagination to play about with. They could discuss it with their wives when they got home, between supper and the wireless. They would listen for it on the nine o'clock news. And there would be Theories about it in the pubs. It was a good yarn all right, with plenty of room for innuendo.

And with luck it would develop. It wouldn't be allowed to die. Certainly it would demand a sequel. I could see a dozen of my colleagues chivvying the police about it next day, and the day after. Then the mystery would be resolved, and everyone would heave a sigh, and feel flat. For no doubt the explanation would be banal enough. It always was.

I can't say I worried about the business myself. I had created too many mysteries to be impressed by one. A conjuror is not interested in a rabbit coming out of a hat.

It was a good story, if it could be kept clear of politics. The least suggestion that it was directed against the regime, and down would come the blue pencil. I must make it the work of a madman.

All of a sudden I felt depressed and lonely. A free-lance works on his own, without the cheer of office comrades. It is a hard, grinding life, picking up crumbs from his colleagues' table. I had been lucky, this once, but when the story died down I could see myself scratching in holes and corners for precarious pickings. No, there is nothing like a regular pay packet on Friday. Nothing. I was too old and lazy for adventure. I called for the bill, drove the car to the lock-up, lay down on the divan, and fell asleep.

WHEN I woke up it was dark. I would have to get to work.

I was lodging then at Marchmont Street, a cosy, ragged street of Georgian houses perched on a row of small shops. My room, a divan bed-sitting room, with hot and cold water in the corner and a gas ring on the hearth stone, was on the fifth floor. I had added a little to the Spartan bareness of the room as furnished by the landlady, shelves for books, two or three semi-sober cushions on the divan, a colorful Van Gogh reproduction from the Zwemmer Gallery. And I had introduced a Parker Knoll chair so that I could sit at ease before the gas fire. It was not a bad room, in its way. It was pleasant and restful. A sad-looking Irish girl kept it clean and brought up my breakfast in the morning. All the other meals I took "on the job," with dinner in one of the many little restaurants in the neighborhood.

The Standard was garaged in a near-by mews, in a lock-up all to itself.

A reporter may use his imagination and invent and invent, but there is usually a better story in the cold truth. I thought I would scour away at the story before letting it loose. There should be a few crumbs of fact still to be picked up, with patience. There might even be an explanation by

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now. I began by telephoning a friend in the Yard. I had worked with him on the Morley murder.

He was in. Yes, I could speak to him.

"That you, Mac?"

"Who is it?" The Yard is always gruff and businesslike with calls from the outside, and its manners had not been improved by Jellaby.

"Swan."

"Ah, yes, I remember." More jovial, but still cautious.

"Listen, I want to get the low-down on that van which crashed into the reservoir railings this morning. I smell a story."

"Well, I'm not dealing with that, you know."

"No, but still. . . ."

"Wait a minute," said the inspector.

There was a pause which went on for some time.

"Are you there?" at last.

"Waiting," said I, patiently.

"There's nothing in it. Just the usual accident."

"What about the rats?"

"Yeh, rats is rats." He laughed.

"No, but seriously. . . ."

"Well, seriously, old man, you're wasting your time. The fellow who saw them isn't sure now they weren't chickens."

"Chickens?" I pondered. Chickens were not so good as rats.

"But what about those bunks, Mac?"

"Chickens. Why not?"

"Not very likely."

"As likely as rats, anyway."

That was true. And still, somehow, all wrong.

"Traced the van yet?"

"Oh, you know about that, eh?"

"I know everything."

"All right. I'll take it. The van was stolen from a disused dump in Chester a fortnight ago."

"Made that up, eh?"

"No, old boy, we leave that to you. We got that through the engine number."

"Still. . . ." I hesitated. "Here's a fellow who steals a van from a dump in Chester and uses it to bring rats and chickens into London in the early hours of the morning. He crashes and runs away, followed by either rats or chickens. That's right, isn't it?"

"Quite right, m'boy. You'll be a model reporter soon."

"Does it convince you, Mac?"

"Okay by me," he said cheerfully.

"You're too light-hearted, Mac. It's no go. I know you. You're tearing your hair out down there over this, ain't you, now?"

"You bet!"

"And so is the Metropolitan Water Board, eh?"

"Damn you," said the inspector softly, and the instrument clicked.

There was nothing to be got out of the Yard. They were sitting mum. They always do when they are at sea.

There was no reply from either the Board or the Borough Council. The offices were shut. But I got the Clerk of the Council at his home.

He was extremely polite and very cautious. Yes, he had heard some fantastic story. But at that he stopped. I was soon aware that he was pumping me, and apologized for bothering him and rang off.

There was nothing for it but to take the car out again and try on the spot.

I parked near the reservoir railings and walked along to the spot where the accident had taken place. A few boards had been put up as a temporary patch.

A policeman loomed up.

"Interested?" he asked, and fingered his holster as a hint.

"Yes," I said, and added: "Press."

He said nothing.

"When did they take the van away?" I asked.

"What van?"

"The one that crashed here this morning."

"Never heard of it."

There was a short silence.

"Just before you came up, officer, I thought I saw a rat on the wall there."

He looked at me.

"Sure it wasn't a chicken?" he sneered.

So he knew all about it, but was sitting tight. We bade each other good night.

I moved on. There was another policeman at the corner. I started walking round the reservoir. There were six officers altogether. All very odd. The reservoir was being guarded.

I WENT back to the car, sat behind the driving wheel, lit a cigarette and considered the story. It was annoying not to be able to break through the police reserve, but that was no bad thing in itself. The public curiosity would be whetted by official reticence. Perhaps it would be unwise to carry the investigation further.

At the moment the affair stood in pretty neat trim. A van had crashed into the railing, the driver had run away, followed by a number of rats escaping from the tail doors of the van. (I was not going to men-

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tion the chickens. This was not a Funny Affair but a Mystery.) The police had arrived hot-foot. The Yard had been called in. There were the bunks, and the cotton wool beds. The reservoir had been tested. Men had stayed there, Doing Things (vague) during the day.

A policeman had guarded the van. The van had been traced to a dump in Chester. The police had guarded the reservoir all night for reasons best known to themselves. And finally, startling developments were to be expected. Meaning by that, just nothing, or at the most, the arrest of the van driver.

No, it would be a mistake to elaborate. At any moment the story might be blown sky high by some simple explanation. It was good enough as it stood, the sort of yarn the registered reader likes. I wasn't going to spill it by delving deeper. It was ripe for writing. With luck, one of the news editors would give me four ten for it. After a short sharp tussle with the starting handle I set off for home. Ten minutes later I ran the car into the lock-up, I turned off the headlights, shut the door, and then remembered that I had left my cigarettes on the driving seat. There was an electric switch by the door. I snipped it on, picked up the cigarette packet, and turned to go out again.

As I turned I chanced to look at the back seat. Lying full stretched out in it was a monkey. At least, that was my first impression. It was lying perfectly still, with its head slewed round towards the back cushion. I watched closer and peered over the side. And suddenly I stepped back, smitten by a compound of fear and amazement. For it was no monkey I was looking at, but a human being. A human being, too, so monstrous that the mind refused to believe the evidence of the eyes. I could only stare, paralyzed.

This creature was perfectly proportioned, and about a foot long. One hand lay trailing on the seat, pathetically opened, the fingers splayed out. The knees were drawn up a little, and the head averted. The whole body was covered with a fine, bright gold hair, which reflected the light. For a second, with intense relief, I believed it was a doll, a child's doll. But even as I looked the belly heaved lightly, heaved again, and was still. A slight spasm seemed to shake the frame, and once more it was still.

I stepped back, and with shaking fingers lit a cigarette. I remember Machen saying in one of his books that if a flower spoke to a man he would be conscious of intense evil, be horrified out of his wits. I must confess that a mere reduction in size of a human body made my knees weak as jelly. I wanted to be sick.

I was completely flabbergasted, bowled over. I do not remember considering for a moment what to do. I was trying, with all my might, to normalize this horror. And already, at the back of my mind, there were the faint stirrings of professional activity. Somewhere in the dim regions of my brain a voice was whispering: "What a story!"

For one moment I was tempted to tiptoe out of the garage, lock it up and go to my room. By morning it might be gone, and after a while I could convince myself it had never existed. It could not possibly exist, anyway. It was, it must be, an hallucination.

I looked at my hands. They were shaking. It must be an hallucination. It must. The thing was not possible.

I looked again, peering over the top. It was still there.

If this really were a human being, a man . . . .

I wiped my forehead and began to think. The first tensity of the shock was over. It undoubtedly was a man.

I suppose that in every human being there is hidden the desire to distinguish himself above his fellows, to be perpetuated in memory for something distinctive. And here, before me, for the first time on earth . . . . I was overwhelmed. No ornithologist, chasing an unknown butterfly was ever more anxious to secure a catch. I became engrossed in the problem of what I was to do to secure the evidence. I must hold this man, see that it did not escape or (a private doubting reservation) vanish. I must bag him. Was he asleep? Or ill? Or—a sudden thought—just shamming?

I became intensely aware of possibilities. If he were asleep, and I woke him . . . he might, for all I knew, be as fiendish as a wild cat. He could hardly be normal mentally. He might be . . . anything. He might scratch my eyes out, bite as viciously as a ferret. The image of the wild cat persisted. Was he wild, or tame? I stretched my hand out tentatively. The belly heaved and I jerked it back. There was a strong, instinctive aversion to touching him. Perhaps, after all, the best thing to do would be to slip out quietly, lock the door, and get help.

But I turned this down. I hardly know why. I shut the door, and went back. Once

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more I peered cautiously over the side.

The head had moved slightly, and I could now see the whole of the face plainly. The face was hairless, the complexion clear but darker than ours. It was a calm, placid, young face, with no lines on the brow or about the nose. But there was something stony still about it, as though it were frozen. I had seen that look before on the faces of men lying unconscious.

THE horror of touching him persisted. I was afraid, I did not know of what. Of a touch, and a sudden shattering leap. It was not in me to do it.

If the little beast was asleep I had to wake it up. Or if it was unconscious, I had to make sure of it. My golf bag was slanting against the wall in a corner. I reached out for the driver and, grasping it by the handle, gently rubbed the club end against the soles of the feet. I had heard that this was the best way to wake a sleeping person without shock, and I wanted to wake it gently. I was afraid of what might happen if it woke suddenly, and leapt. There was no doubt of the way I would act. I could feel the panic under my skin, quite irrational, but there it was. I would have slammed out in a frenzy, and beaten it to a pulp. It would have been murder.

I tried the club again, rubbing and tickling gently. But there was no response of any kind. It was not sleep, this. It was deeper than sleep.

But what to do now? Once more I looked around, hoping for an inspiration. On a shelf above my head was an old rug which I threw over the bonnet on cold winter nights. I would wrap the beast up in it and carry it home.

I laid an edge of the rug on the back seat and leant forwards to roll the little man on to the rug. But at the last moment I could not do it. I could not touch it with my fingers. Once more I had to use the driver. Gently, intently, I rolled him over and waited. Another roll, and he was over the edge. With extreme care and trepidation I picked up the four corners of the rug, then brought them swiftly together, raising the rug high. I felt the weight of the body as it fell into the trough, but there was no further commotion. Quickly I tied the four corners so that the rug was turned into a bag, and laid it on the seat.

I was still in a quandary as to how it should be carried home. But now he was imprisoned, safe enough. At the very worst I had only to throw the rug away and bolt.

All this sounds very circumspect. Perhaps cowardly is the right word, and I am not particularly afraid of it. There certainly was an odd element of funk. I was afraid. You may say that a child man that size could only do a sixth of the damage a full-sized man could do. Which is no answer to the problem of why we are, most of us, more afraid of a tarantula or a rat or a snake than an elephant. It is mobility and will that counts. And he looked as if he could be diabolically mobile.

I picked up the bag, turned out the light, locked the door, and set out for my room. There were few people about, and none of them looked surprised at the rug held so unconventionally. But I was conscious all the time of a little red-haired unconscious simulacrum of myself, heaped up in a jumble of arms and legs in the trough of the rug. I did not forget him for a second, and was mightily relieved when I got home and locked the door behind me.

Once at home, I felt more at ease. I turned up the gas fire, put on the ceiling light and my reading lamp, drew the curtains, and sat down, to think, the rug at my feet, still tied at the corners. I was as nonplussed as if I had caught an angel.

There were so many things that one could do with him. The Zoo, for instance. Presumably one might telephone the Zoo. There would be some official on duty. And no doubt he would listen patiently before ringing off. It was quite certain that he would think me drunk, or mad. The right way to get him to come would be to tell him I had snaffled a jaguar in Hyde Park. He would be more ready to believe that. There are jaguars, anyway.

I could telephone one of the news editors and ask him to come along. And I had no doubt he would, with a photographer. News editors will believe anything, if it is incredible enough.

Gingerly I untied the rug and drew it out flat before the fire. The little beast, his red hairs glinting in the light, lay perfectly still.

"Wake up," I whispered.

I looked at him for a long time, lying there on the rug. Loosely sprawled upon the tartan, he looked strangely beautiful, a perfect statuette, one hand over his chest, the other flung out as if in utter weariness. I had seen men lie like that since the revolution, with the same inexpressible, ingrained weariness of the face. Looking upon him, I ceased to be afraid. The features were so intelligent, so calm and unruffled that one could not associate them with evil.

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I BEGAN to fear that he would never wake up. Perhaps it would be necessary to obtain help. A doctor would know what to do. So far as I could see there was no injury. But he might be dying for all that.

And I did not want him to die. Here, surely, was the world's greatest story. There was no end to it. And the little fellow was mine. Mine.

I leant back and considered possibilities.

My mind ran through the whole gamut. The Press. Film rights. The music halls. There was a tremendous fortune lying to my hand, if properly exploited.

Later, I might teach him to speak, and hear his story. I had no doubt but that he was intelligent. Did he speak already? And in what tongue? Where did he come from? How had he got into my car?

And with a shock I realized the truth. He hitched up with the broken van, with rats. He was one of those beasts the man had seen running after the driver. But if that were so, there were others. Perhaps still at large. In London. And there was at least one other man who knew of their existence.

Did the police know?

Why were they so suspicious, so close lipped about the whole affair? Did they know already what the van had contained? That would account for their activities during the day. They would want to know. They would want to know very badly what was afoot.

Where the devil did the little fellow come from? How many more of them were there—men, and perhaps, women, too?

I will confess that a number of possibilities presented themselves, all incredible and foolish enough now, but not so fantastic then. I even thought of Mars. No one knows what a wild farrago of pseudo-scientific nonsense the contemporary mind contains, ready to brave it out as sound sense, until one is up against the supra-normal. Wells is responsible for a lot. I even pondered the possibility of a laboratory product, a chemist Frankenstein at work somewhere in the home counties. Even the old tale of Pygmalion did not seem so utterly incredible. But the truth, the simple natural truth, as I knew it later, eluded me completely.

"Wake up," I whispered, and went down on my knees to look more closely at him.

The lips were slightly parted and he was breathing deeply and regularly. The look on his face was lighter, less profoundly sleep-stricken. I touched his forehead gently with my finger, and he moaned.

My old abhorrence of touching him was gone. I lifted him gently and put him nearer the fire. He was astonishingly heavy. Slippery, too.

I got up and looked for the brandy flask. There was still a little left. I poured the brandy out into a tablepsoon, diluted it with water, and tried to give some of it to him.

It was difficult. I had to hold his head cupped in one hand and force the teeth apart with the edge of the spoon. Most of the liquid dribbled out of the corner of his mouth, but he swallowed some of it. He was shaken with a fit of coughing. His head slipped out of my hand and fell with a tiny thud on the rug. The next instant his eyes were wide open.

And there was I, gaping, one hand on my knee, the other holding the spoon poised in mid-air. His eyes focused a second on the glittering spoon. A pucker wrinkled his brow. Then his eyes swerved slowly towards me, and came to rest on mine with a startled suddenness.

We looked at each other an appreciable time.

His eyes closed wearily, as if they were dazzled by the light. He passed a hand over his forehead, rubbed an eyelid busily, and yawned. Once more the eyes opened slowly. With a heave of the flanks he slewed himself sideways and raised his head to have a better look at me.

I really do not know what possessed me then. The eyes were bright, like an animal's. By which I mean that it was impossible to know, as one knows with a human being, the intelligence or the temper or—how shall I put it?—the emotion of the owner. They were, to me, just bright eyes with no meaning. I was extraordinarily anxious to make friends with him, to let him know that I meant no harm to him. But unconsciously I could not associate an adult mind with such tiny proportions. The idea of a baby with bright, piercing eyes and undeveloped intelligence was irresistible.

I smiled. A sort of wide, foolish, motherly smile it was meant to be. And he was obviously puzzled. Even as I smiled I realized that no contact was being made. Perhaps to him, a smile meant no more than it does to a wild animal, a baring of fangs . . . a challenge. I stopped smiling as if I had switched off a light. We looked at one another.

I have a few baby tricks, not many, but just enough to get along with.

"Ipsy dipsy," said I, rapidly corrugating

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and smoothing my brow. "Ipsy, dipsy."

He raised his head further. He was interested. I tried the first of my repertoire, a clicking of the tongue against the roof of the mouth to imitate a trotting horse.

"Dloot-dla, dloot-dla, dloot-la." This time I had got him. A smile flitted across his face. My baby was amused.

Then I tried my second bit of infant entertainment, I drew a cork out of my mouth with a loud plop. It was certainly a success. He began laughing. "Plop," I went again. He laughed, a little louder. "Plop," again. And this time he rolled over on his back and yelled, little cascades of laughter rolling out of his mouth.

I remembered that no animal laughs. Even monkeys do not laugh. This, then ....

But even so, there was a barrier in my mind to admitting the little beast in my image to be anything but an animal. Of course it was an animal. There were no dwarfs that size.

At any rate, whatever it was, I had succeeded in amusing it. The laughter rang out merrily.

"Ipsy, dipsy," I went again, crooking my forefingers above each ear and wagging them.

The little fellow wiped the tears from his eyes, turned them, still swimming with merriment upon me, and said:

"Don't, for God's sake, you'll be the death of me."

FOR a second I could not believe my ears. But . . . his mouth had moved. The words, uttered in a pleasant, boyish voice, were clear enough. I stared at him. Then I stood up, my knees shaking curiously. I sat down again.

The creature had just talked! And far from taking it naturally, my whole being was in revolt against it. I was, in fact, horrified.

The dwarf was watching me steadily. I felt I had to say something.

"What . . . what is your name?" I stuttered.

"Napoleon," he answered.

But I did not feel inclined to laugh.

"Well, Napoleon," I said at length, my tongue dry in my mouth, "what . . . what are we going to do about it?"

"I would like something to eat," he replied gravely.

I got up.

"I will get you something," I said, and turned towards the door. Already I had determined to fly. I would get out into the streets and think it over. I couldn't deal with this on my own. The little fellow jumped to his feet, too.

"No," he said.

He twisted past the chair in a flash and stood between me and the door.

"Get out of the way," I muttered, advancing slowly towards him, my fists clenched hysterically.

"Stop where you are," he said.

He swerved round, leapt for the handle of the door, swung there a fraction of a second. I heard the key turn in the door, and he had dropped on the floor and was away like lightning. I lost sight of him.

"Sit down," he said. I stood there, trembling, and couldn't decide where the voice was coming from. He might have been . . . anywhere, under the divan, or the chair, or behind the curtains in the window.

I sat down and waited.

"There is no need to get alarmed," the voice said. And he came out from under the hot and cold water basin in the corner.

I said nothing, but sat watching.

Almost with one uninterrupted movement he shinned up the leg of the table, swung a moment from the edge, then leapt up and moved calmly to the fruit dish.

For the next five minutes I watched him eating a banana, slowly and deliberately. He kept glancing towards me now and again.

"Your hands are shaking," he said.

I looked at them. It was true.

"There is really no need to be alarmed," he repeated.

I wondered where the key was.

"Be reasonable," he urged.

"How did you get into my car?" I asked.

He sat cross-legged upon the table.

"I saw you talking to the policeman, earlier in the day," he countered. "But I was too far away to hear what you were saying."

"Did you come in that van, then?"

He looked at me and seemed to be considering.

"Yes," he said at last.

"What happened?" I asked. I was feeling less tense by now. With each moment that passed talking with him seemed less monstrous, less outside nature.

"There was a crash," he said.

"Who was driving?" I asked.

"That doesn't matter," he answered, with an evasive twist of the head. "There was a crash and I . . . bumped my head."

"You mean?"

"I was knocked silly," he said. "The others . . ." He gave me a sharp look and began again. "I found myself alone. I heard

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someone moving about outside the van and slipped away quietly. It was quite easy. I had only to drop out of the tail into the grass between the railing and the wall and slip along. It was still fairly dark."

"What were you doing in the van?" I asked. "I saw those curious bunks."

"Bunks?" he asked.

"Well, beds then."

"They were uncomfortable," he said. "We'll have to think of something better than that. Whenever the van bumped, we bumped with it. Horrible, particularly going round sharp corners. Some of us were pulped to a jelly, blue all over."

"How many of you were there?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter," he answered lightly. "I was telling you about what happened to myself. I went along the wall about fifty yards and then slipped across the road. That was only just in time, for the police began arriving. I had to hide somewhere. I was tempted to make for the back gardens, but I still hoped they would come back for me, so I thought it would be better to stay within sight of the van. I crept from front garden to front garden until I was almost opposite where the van had crashed. There I found a thickish bush. I didn't like being so near the road, but I had to keep an eye on it for fear they came back. I swung up into the bush and waited."

"And didn't they come back?"

"No," he answered. I thought I detected a note of perplexity in his voice.

"Why should they come back?" I asked.

Instead of answering he picked up the telephone receiver idly from its stand. He was obviously not thinking of what he was doing. Faintly, I heard the operator ask, "Number, please." It must have been louder to him.

He dropped the receiver with a clatter and leapt over the fruit dish.

"What was that?" he whispered. And for the first time I saw he was afraid.

I got up and replaced the receiver.

"Don't you know what this is?" I asked.

"No," he said.

"A telephone," I said.

"I have read about it," he said.

IT WAS odd to discover such a chink in his armour. By now I had begun to take it for granted that he knew as much about things as any ordinary man. It was a strange lapse.

"Never seen one before?"

"No."

"You live in the country?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"You could speak to anybody, if you wanted to."

He looked up suddenly.

"No," and he shook his head.

"Haven't got one of these?"

"There's a wireless . . ." he began, and then stopped short.

"By the way," he added quietly, "it's no use pumping me."

"I'm not," I answered, trying to make it sound indignant.

"Oh, yes, you are. But listen. If I did say something . . . compromising . . . I'd have to kill you, you know."

He said it pleasantly, with a smile.

"Then I hope you won't say anything compromising," I answered. And I wondered, unpleasantly, exactly how he would set about the task.

"I will tell you this much," he said. "There are reasons against disclosing where I live, where I come from, who we are . . . oh, all sorts of things. So I do hope that you will not let your curiosity run away with you."

"What do you mean to do about my dinner, for example?" I asked lightly.

"Feeling hungry?"

"I usually have dinner about this time," I answered.

"What is wrong with the fruit?"

"I'd rather have dinner."

"Try the fruit . . . all the same."

There was no evading the issue. I was a prisoner in my own room. The key was hidden somewhere. I was not afraid any longer of what might happen, but still . . . there was no use in flying against Providence. He had talked of killing me as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

I ate two or three apples and a banana and made myself some coffee over the gas ring. He watched me gravely all the while.

"You haven't finished your story," I said, sitting down again.

"I felt very ill in the bush," he said. "That's where I left off, wasn't it? I hadn't been able to sleep the night before, as you can well understand, and the blow to my head pained me a great deal. I had a racking headache, and the noise of passing motor cars was terrifying. I tried to get some sleep, but what with the noise and the fear of being seen in the bush, I was not able to get a wink. When night fell I determined to get away at all costs. And your car, parked so near, gave me a chance. I fell into a profound sleep the moment I touched the cushion. I think I fainted."

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"You must have," I said. "Feeling all right now?"

"Not bad."

"Why did your parents call you Napoleon?"

"Why not?" he countered.

"Well, to begin with, he was a great general."

"So am I," he said.

"But without an army?"

"That is as may be."

"Curiosity on that point means death, I suppose?"

"You are right."

"Tell me, how would a little man like you set about killing someone several times your height and weight?"

"Oh, plenty of ways," he said.

I could not decide whether he was bluffing or not.

No more was said for a long time. I lit a cigarette and tried to think the business out. Napoleon sat cross-legged on the table, his chin cupped thoughtfully in the hollow of a hand. I was no longer afraid of him. I had, in fact, begun to like him. I felt sure that he meant no harm.

"The light is strong," he said.

"You ought to go to sleep," I answered. "You must be tired. I shall turn the top light off."

"Thank you."

We sat in the green shade of the reading lamp, in silence.

What was I to do? I felt pretty sure I could escape, if I wanted to. The rug was still lying near my feet. I could pick it up and thrown it over his head, pin him down, and telephone for help to the police, if need be. But I did not want to do that unless it was necessary.

Already an idea was stirring in my mind. For the first time in my life the truly extraordinary had happened. Something fresh and hitherto unrecorded in the world had happened. Somewhere or other there were more of his sort. What were they up to? Who was the driver? And what was his relation to them? What, for example, were they doing in London? Napoleon undoubtedly had a secret, a secret he was afraid of disclosing. If I were to smother him under the rug and call the police, I would have a tale to tell which would shake the world. But afterwards? I knew the police. Politely, but firmly, I would be edged out. They would pursue their inquiries, patiently, ruthlessly, doling out just so much information as they considered advisable. I would be out of it.

And I did not want to be out of it. I wanted to be *in* this, in it up to the neck. It might be dangerous. I didn't know. But I was not going to give him up. He must lead me, by hook or by crook, to the others.

"I can't make up my mind what to do with you," said Napoleon suddenly.

"How do you mean?"

"Well . . ." He scratched his chin delicately. "I have a lot to thank you for. I mean . . . you saved me, didn't you? Perhaps I owe my life to you. But," suddenly his voice grew firmer, "I just don't see how I can let you live."

I thought it best not to say anything.

"I've *got* to kill you," he said.

"It might be the other way round," I smiled.

"You do not believe that, do you! Why, you would not stand a chance."

"You are quite a little fellow, you know."

"Do you really believe you could kill me if you wanted to?" He seemed tremendously surprised.

"I'd have a good try at it."

"No, but seriously!" His surprise was comical. Napoleon, at that moment, struck me as an insufferable little boaster.

"Look," he said.

He got to his feet—and then extraordinary things happened. He leapt from side to side with the swiftness, the litheness of a mongoose. The eyes could hardly follow him. Now he was here. Now there. A flick of the hand, a curl of the thigh round the leg of the table and he was on the floor. The next second he was by the window. He raced up the edge of a curtain and grimaced from the top of the pole. A thrust of the body and he was hurtling over to the curtain which shrouds the hot and cold water basin. The curtain pulled taut. He was hanging on the edge, swaying gently, grinning.

"You see," he said. And the next instant he was back again on the table, leaning over the telephone receiver.

"And I am not feeling very well, really."

"I dare say you could avoid me," I said, "but . . ."

"Oh, I could get you easily enough," he said quietly. And then he produced my razor from behind the telephone.

"All right," I said, "I give in."

I HAD a nasty vision of Napoleon slitting my throat as he swung from curtain to curtain, hacking at my legs, shinning up my back. There would be precious little defense against that. It sent a cold shiver down my spine.

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"Don't you want to know why I've got to kill you?" he asked.

I cleared my throat, but found it difficult to say anything.

"I've got to kill you," he said quietly. But there was a heartening lack of conviction in his voice.

"Tell me," I said, but my voice was strange to me.

"You see," he said, waving a hand over the telephone, "you *know*. And Solomon is particular about that. No one must know."

"Know what?"

"About me. About us. We have to keep dark."

"Is Solomon the driver?" I asked, but he did not answer.

"Does anyone know about you besides the driver?"

"No one. And Mother, of course."

"But if I promised not to say anything?"

"You wouldn't keep your promise."

"I might."

"But you wouldn't."

I tried another tack.

"How are you going to get back?"

"I don't know . . . yet."

"Do you know where Solomon is to be found?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Will you walk, or what?"

"It's too far . . . I could ride on a train for part of the way. I know what a train is," he said, suddenly proud as a small boy of five. "I've seen one."

"But you couldn't find your way to the station!"

"No. There is that. You have a map of London, I suppose?"

"But you don't know where you are."

"I could find out at the street corner."

"So you could. But then, you would have to walk through the streets, quite a long way. You would be sure to be seen."

"I doubt it," he said.

"There are people in the streets all night, you know. Policemen. An occasional worker."

"I'd have to risk that."

"And if someone saw you?"

"He'd be easy to kill," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Can't I help you?" I asked.

"I'd like to see a map of the streets."

"No. I mean to take you out of town."

"In the motor car?"

"Yes."

"You might drive me anywhere. And I wouldn't know."

"I'd promise. I want to see you safe."

He considered that a moment.

"But I could never be *sure*. Dirty tricks," he added, clicking his tongue.

He sat on the edge of the table, with the razor, open, in his hand.

"Listen. I will drive you out of town and to wherever you want to go. Why not let Solomon decide what is to be done with me?"

"But I have orders. . . ."

"To kill?"

"Anyone who sees us clearly."

"Still . . ." And then I didn't know what further to say. He swung his legs over the edge of the table.

"I'll think about it," he said.

I tried to keep quiet, not to say anything, but could not hold out for long.

"Let me tell you why you can trust me. Today I was sacked."

"What does that mean?"

"I was paid off."

"I don't understand."

"I am without work."

"But do you want to work!"

And then I realized that he had no idea of what I was talking about. The whole system of work and wages meant nothing to him. I explained as simply as I could.

"You have no work," he said, "and so you starve."

I thought it best to leave it at that.

"So it doesn't matter to you if I do kill you."

I let that stand, too.

"I am glad it doesn't matter to you one way or the other," he said.

"Of course," I amplified, "I would like to find work again and live. I don't want to die."

"I wish I knew what to do," he said. "If I let you take me back, Solomon may not like it. My orders are to kill."

"You could kill me afterwards," I said.

"That's true. I'll think about it. You had better go to bed. I'll think about it when you are asleep."

HE SHIFTED his position to the window, with a hand on the curtain. I could see that he did not trust me. I undressed and got into bed. It was a divan bed.

"Look here," I said suddenly, sitting up as an idea struck me. "You will not kill me when I am asleep?"

"But why not!" He seemed genuinely surprised. "You will not know anything about it."

"I want to know, all the same. Promise you will wake me up before you do anything."

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"Hey, what the devil! Stop it! Keep orf!"

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"Are you quite sure?" he asked. My attitude was obviously incomprehensible to him.

"Yes, quite.

"I promise," he said.

He said it in such a simple, straightforward way that I believed him absolutely. But for all that I struggled against sleep. He turned the hand lamp out. Turned the gas fire out. The room was quite dark. I lay still, a prey to strange imaginings. I heard nothing. I did not know where he was. The key was hidden somewhere.

There was no hope of escape. If he wanted to kill me, it would be simple. And yet I believed him. I slept.

I felt a pinch on the lobe of my ear and jumped convulsively. Memory flooded my mind and I was instantly awake, shivering. The room was dark.

"Are you awake?" The voice was almost in my ear.

I thought, This is my last chance. He has kept his promise and wakened me up. To kill me! The voice was quite near. If I hit out now with all my strength, I might, with a little luck. . . .

The room was flooded with green light. He had turned on the reading lamp.

My heart throbbed painfully. But if he was going to kill me, he would not turn on the light, surely. . . .

He must have realized something of my terror.

"I am not going to kill you," he said gently.

"Thank you," I gulped.

I had not known how profoundly agitated I had been until peace swept down over me.

"We must go," he said. "I want you to drive me out of London. Will you get dressed?"

He was sitting on the occasional table, under the shade of the reading lamp. The golden hairs on his body glistened brightly. My razor was still in his hand. It was almost as long as he was.

I got out of bed and dressed hurriedly. Nothing more was said. I packed a bag with a change of clothes, put in my weekend tackle, and was ready.

"I usually shave when I get up," I remarked.

"There is not time."

"All right, then, I'll put in my safety. Where is the key?"

"The door is unlocked."

"Are we ready, then?"

He nodded his head. I tried the handle. The door opened. I tiptoed silently as I could downstairs, and opened the outer door. I did not see him come out, but when I looked round he was standing a few feet away.

I walked towards the garage, carrying the bag.

"Don't turn round," he said. "It looks suspicious. Behave naturally. Don't worry about me at all. I can take care of myself."

And after that I went through the routine of opening the lock-up, starting the car and backing it out as if I were on my own.

"We forgot the rug," he said. The voice came from the back seat. "I must get something to hide in."

I went back into the garage and found an old mackintosh. I threw it into the back seat without looking.

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Which direction are we to go?"

"Westwards, please."

CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS half-past three when we set out. It was dark, with few people about. London was asleep. At Camden Town a group of men were working on the tramway under a powerful flare. There was a light mist on the northern heights, but the North Circular was clear. As we cruised along that magnificent highway, we met an occasional heavy lorry thundering in from the West. Otherwise the road was clear. Once, at a crossing, the lights turned red and I stopped. A little Austin Seven crossed perkily. I wondered what it was doing there at that time of night. Napoleon made no sign. I did not glance over my shoulder to see if he was on the look-out.

At Hillingdon, where one gets the first authentic sniff of country, a small posse of policemen turned from the narrow main street down a side lane.

The sergeant disengaged himself from the posse and held up his hand.

"Hide," I whispered, and pulled up.

"Where are you going to?" asked the sergeant, flashing a torch in my face.

"Press," I said.

"Show me your card."

I took it out of my breast pocket and gave it to him. He looked at it carefully, and with the help of the flashlamp verified the photograph.

"What is your name?" he asked.

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"Albert Swan."

"Huh." He looked at the card. "And the number of the car?" he rapped.

"P D 1753."

He looked suspicious as he waved me on.

The old Standard was not capable of more than forty-five. We cruised along towards Oxford at a steady forty. Beyond Beaconsfield a sleepy garage man filled the tank with petrol.

We reached Oxford in under two hours. It was beginning to get light, with streaks of dirty grey towards the east. Workmen were cycling along, and we met an occasional car, the lights still burning.

"Make for the north-west," said Napoleon suddenly from the back seat.

I was startled. He had said nothing all the way from London.

"Will Worcester be all right?" I asked.

"Worcester?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. You know best."

I took the Worcester Road.

About ten miles beyond Oxford, he spoke again. We were in the country, and it was light.

"Will you stop, please?"

I pulled up the car, and looked back. Napoleon was peering out from under the raincoat. He thrust it to one side. He seemed satisfied. I noticed that he still had the razor in his hand.

"What! Still carrying the razor?" I asked jocularly.

"Of course."

"You don't trust me?"

"Oh, yes, I do, but . . ."

"But what?"

He looked at me, with his head perked to one side.

"You are so very much bigger," he said, and smiled.

"Well, do we go on?"

"May I see your book, please?"

He jumped down on to the seat and pointed to the A.A. Guide. I pulled it out of the front pocket and put it on the seat. His eyes watched me warily the while, and I could see by the sudden tensing of the thigh muscles that he was prepared for an instant leap. It annoyed me.

He twisted the book round and opened it, ruffling the pages until he came to the maps.

"This is the one, I think," he said. "Here is Oxford." A transparent pink nail rested on the map. "Now let me see." The finger ran along a road and stopped. "Worcester," he said. His head slewed to the west and he considered awhile. "All right, make it Worcester."

"And after that?"

"I'll tell you."

An hour and a half later, as we were approaching Evesham, I said that I was feeling peckish.

"Peckish?" He was in the back seat again.

"Hungry."

"Stop near an orchard, then."

There were plenty of orchards along the road, the trees laden with apples.

"I would prefer to buy them," I said.

"I am hungry, too," he retorted. I could not see what that had to do with it.

"We can hardly stop on the main road. We'll be seen." There were quite a few cars.

"Turn up a lane, then."

I turned up a lane, twisty, narrow, with high hedges. Soon we came to the top of a ridge, Below, to the right, was an orchard. There was no house near. I pulled up at the side of the road.

"I'll get you some apples," I said.

He considered that a moment.

"Too risky," he said. "No, I'll do it."

"I might drive on," I teased, "and leave you there."

"I can take your ignition key," he said. It struck me as odd that he, who knew little of telephones, should know about ignition keys.

"These old cars haven't got one," I said.

"It doesn't matter. I'll be back in a moment."

HE WENT over the side of the car. The razor was still in his hand. I saw him disappear through the bars of the gate, and remembered the rats. I could not blame the man who had thought they were rats. His movement was so quick and accurate.

I looked idly over the gate, still sitting in the car. Something thumped heavily on the ground to the left, away from sight. I guessed that he was up a tree, pulling the apples.

Another apple fell, and another.

Then I heard a shout.

"Gawd!" said a voice. And then, "What the hell! Hey! What the hell!"

The apples had stopped falling. I stood up to leave the car, then sat down again. I expected Napoleon back in a flash, and started the car. For a wonder, the self-starter worked.

There was a crash from beyond the hedge, and I saw what looked like a stick

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sailing through the air above the branches.

"Missed!" said the voice. And then, peremptorily: "Hey, you!"

I sprang up, swung open the door, and stepped out. Suddenly there was a yell, the yell of a terrified man.

"Stop it. Keep orf. Hey, blast you!"

And then, in sort of a scream: "Help! Help!"

"Napoleon!" I yelled. "Napoleon!" And rushed to the gate.

A policeman, the helmet fallen from his head, was running and stumbling through the grass. I could hear his gasps, his short, quick breath. He held a hand out towards the tree to steady himself as he swung round. I was horrified to see that it was swimming with blood. As he came round he faced me and screamed again, putting a hand up to his face. I saw a flash of gold fur, a glint of blade, and heard another scream.

"Napoleon," I shouted frantically.

I swung the gate half open. The policeman saw me and ran, blindly, towards the gap. Once he stumbled to his knees, then rose and flung on. He was near enough now for me to see his face. It was grey and ashen with terror, his eyes staring. The breath was roaring in his throat.

He reached the gate and hung on to it helplessly. His head sagged lower over the top bar, then the legs shook violently, the knees gave way, and he collapsed in a heap.

I bent down over him. Both wrists were cut, and the carotid. The blood was still pulsing out feebly. Napoleon was nowhere to be seen.

"Napoleon," I whispered. Then, "Napoleon," again.

He stepped out from behind a tree trunk, his head barely visible above the grass.

"We must go on," he said calmly.

"You've killed him," I said, and was filled with a swift, cold stroke of darkness.

"He saw me," he said. "I had to kill him."

"Beast," I shouted. "You rotten little beast."

"We must go on," he said, moving towards me. I got to my feet.

"It's no good," I said. "They'll find him, and then—they'll get me. They are sure to get me. I was seen turning off the road. There are the tire marks."

"Are you going to drive on?"

"No," I said.

He came nearer. The open razor was in his hands.

"Listen. . . ." I said.

I had expected him to order me back to the car, to be curt and peremptory. There would have been no choice. I had already witnessed what he could do.

Instead of that he nodded his head and squatted in the grass.

"I am listening," he said gravely.

"This man can't be left here. Someone will find him, and the police will be on our track in no time."

"And then?"

"They will get me. I won't be able to clear myself."

He shrugged his shoulders, and I broke into a cold sweat. He did not care whether I was hanged or not. I was nothing to him.

"If they get me," I said, "there will be nothing for it but to tell them . . . everything."

I could see him thinking that over. I could almost *see* the conclusion in his eye. Why not remove that possibility now, at once?

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

"Put him in the car, drive to the nearest police station, and come back for you later."

"But you may not come back."

"I will."

"You may tell the police what you know."

"No. Listen, how could I? They would consider me as much responsible for the murder as you are. Don't you see? They wouldn't believe me."

"All right," he said suddenly. "Put him in the car."

I did not wait for further orders, but lifted up the policeman and somehow managed to push his great, limp weight into the back of the car. The engine was still running, and I got into the driver's seat. Napoleon was by the side of the road. I depressed the clutch and put the car into gear, ready.

"When will you come back?" he asked.

I was filled with loathing, with black detestation for this bestial little fiend, this heartless homicide.

I looked at him, stuttering and grinning with rage.

He must have seen what was in my mind, read it plain on my face. For suddenly he acted. The razor flashed open in his hand. Already I had let in the clutch and my foot was pressing the accelerator. I saw the red fur streak from the ground to the top of the spare wheel, and from the wheel he leapt at me. I caught him

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in mid air, a lucky swipe of the hand, and he was thrown violently into the hedge. I looked at my hand, and even then realized my good fortune. The razor had missed.

THE car was gaining speed rapidly. I glanced in the mirror. The tiny figure was hopping about on the road in a dervish dance of impotent rage.

The lane veered left. I turned at a crossroad. Half a mile further it debouched on the main road and I tore down into Evesham.

At that time I had no idea what I was going to do. I kept on looking at my hand to make sure the razor had missed. It would have been difficult to explain if there had been a cut.

I had not made up my mind then whether to tell the truth or not.

If I did, would they believe? And if they did not believe me, what would they think of the story? It was obviously the story of a madman suffering from delusions. And the policeman's death would be at my door.

But on the other hand, if I did not tell them . . . how would I stand then? I would feel my way and see how things went.

On the very outskirts of Evesham, a policeman was standing in the shade of a tree, scrutinizing passing cars. The pleasant afternoon sunshine flooded the quiet street, glinting on shop windows. The policeman turned away as if he had remembered something to do further down the street. I hooted sharply and pulled the car up. The policeman turned round, his healthy, country face a little admonitory at this needless noise in paradise.

I watched him curiously, as if he were something on the stage, in another and unreal world. He took a few steps towards me. I noted the perfect geniality of his face as he approached. The revolution had not yet perverted the country police. When he was on a level, the tension broke in me.

"Look," I cried hysterically, and pointed to the back seat.

His face changed and closed, and then he was leaning over the car. I heard his sharp intake of breath.

"Lord," he said. Then: "It's Bill."

He flung the door open and lifted the man's head.

"Dead." Then: "Here, what . . ."

In a flash, as it seemed to me, he had opened the door and seated himself next to me. I heard the door clang to. A woman crossed from a shop window, curious. He half stood up and waved her back.

"Drive on," he said. "First left, then right."

There was a cold, grim determination on his face, now white under the tan.

He sat near the doorway, slewed round towards me. He did not take his eyes away. There was a revolver in his hand.

"I found him. . . ."

"All right," he barked. "First right for the station."

I obeyed.

"Pull up here, on the right."

I made the correct sign, mechanically, and pulled over to the right and stopped in front of the station.

For a moment we stayed there. I switched off the engine.

The policeman held me by the left wrist.

"Now, get out."

I looked at him in surprise.

"You don't think . . ." I began.

"Hurry up," he said.

I opened the door with my free hand and got out. He scrambled past the gear

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and the steering wheel and stood by my side.

"Come along," he said.

We entered the station. Still gripping my wrist, he thrust me, firmly but gently, into the charge room.

A sergeant sitting at the table looked up.

"Sergeant," said the policeman, his lip quivering, "Bill's dead . . . out there in a car. This man's car. He drove him into the town. Better . . ."

"Can I sit down?" I said, my knees almost giving way. The sergeant jumped up and pushed a chair under me.

The rest of it seemed to take place in a dream. The sergeant pressed a bell. Two constables came in. He ordered them to take the car round to the courtyard.

"Don't touch the body," he said. "Get the doctor."

Then he was speaking into the telephone. "Superintendent? Yes, sir. Constable Thomas found dead. Yes, sir, in a car. The driver is here. Yes, sir. Certainly."

"Give him a glass of water," said the sergeant. "All right, I'll look after him."

The constable left the room, and came back with a glass of water.

"Drink that," ordered the sergeant.

I drank the whole glass off at a gulp.

The constable stood by the door, rigid. The sergeant cleared some papers from the table, and sat down.

"Now then," he said, facing me.

I looked up at him, still feeling dizzy.

"All right," said the sergeant, not unkindly. "Better get his story first."

He turned to the constable.

"I was on duty at Ellam Street . . ." began the constable officially.

"Cut all that out, George," muttered the sergeant. "Tell me what happened, quick."

"He stopped the car and called me," said the constable. "Then he pointed to the back seat and I saw Bill there, murdered. I got in and he drove me here."

The sergeant nodded.

"Now then." He turned to me. "The quicker you can tell me the better."

"I picked him up . . ." I began.

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"About three miles out, at the gate of an orchard. . . ."

"That'll be Osman's Hill," said the sergeant. "Let's see. He was out there this morning to look into the apple stealing. Yes, go on."

"He was dead, but still bleeding," I said. "I got him into the car and brought him along as quickly as I could."

"See anybody?" the sergeant rapped.

"No."

One of the constables who had been ordered out to the car came in.

"How did he get killed?" asked the sergeant.

"Cut about with a razor. Both wrists and the neck."

"Get him!" said the sergeant. "Do you hear me? Get him. Take the cars out with as many as you can find. Search the countryside. Go over that orchard. Find the razor. All right, off you go."

The constable ran to the door.

"Take the C.I.D. men with you."

The inner door opened and a tall, thin-faced man came in. The superintendent, I guessed.

The sergeant talked to him for some time in a low voice. I caught the word "razor."

The superintendent took the sergeant's chair.

Did you carry a razor, by any chance?"

"No," I said.

I WAS in a trap. If they searched my baggage they would find all my shaving things, but no razor. And then I remembered with intense relief that there *was* a razor. A safety razor. When I had plenty of time I used to shave with a cut-throat, but when time pressed I used the safety.

The superintendent made a note.

"How many razors have you?"

"One safety, and one cut-throat," I answered.

It was not strictly true. I had one safety and *two* cut-throats. I wondered if the Irish girl had noticed that. If my room were searched they would find the cut-throat. I remembered putting the safety in my bag.

"Name and address."

I told him.

"Occupation?"

"Press man."

He became a shade more careful. Jellaby was cultivating the Press.

"On the register?"

"Yes."

"You realize," he smiled under his moustache, "that this is all routine stuff?"

"Quite."

"Now about finding him. You say he was at the gate."

"Yes, on the far side of the gate."

"Was it open?"

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"Yes, a bit." There was no need to lie more than was necessary.

"You said he was bleeding?"

"He was. A little. But he was quite dead."

"How did you come to see him?"

"Something caught my eye just as I was passing."

"Yes, I see. How fast were you going?"

But I was not to be caught with that.

"Oh, just crawling along. I had got tired of driving on the main roads and thought I would try the lanes."

"I see. On a job?"

"No. As a matter of fact . . . I am not."

I could have bitten my tongue. "As a matter of fact" is so often the prelude to a lie.

This tiny slip set me on my guard. Before, I had not paid much attention, not been too closely involved, I mean. After all, I was not the murderer. I had nothing to suppress except a thing so fantastic that the police would not have believed it anyway. And it wasn't as if I was fresh to the game. I had seen men grilled before. The police were my daily food and drink, my professional material. I was not afraid of them in the way a layman often is. I was at home with them, knew their little ways inside out. They would not be able to get any change from me.

But all the same. . . .

They can't be trifled with.

I reviewed the situation rapidly. And got a blow.

I must not be caught lying on any account. The least lie and up their ears prick, and down go their noses on the trail.

And already I had been guilty of a foolish lie, one easily detected.

I could imagine one of their men walking up and down between the hedges, measuring, peering, tracing the tire marks. I had said that I had seen something at the gate, that something had caught my eye as I went past. Even at ten miles an hour, considering my brakes—and they would not forget that—I must have overshot the gate by a few yards. Then—what more natural?—I would reverse as far as the gate. I had to reverse sooner or later, for the car had been opposite the gate when I pushed the body into it. The blood spots on the road would show that.

And I had not reversed at all.

Then suppose . . . suppose someone, after all, had witnessed the scene from a distance? It so often happens. It is difficult to do anything in these islands without someone witnessing it. What would such a witness have to say?

He would have seen me come to a standstill, and wait for some little time in the car. I did not believe that anyone had been near enough to see Napoleon. Then I had got out, and shouted. And then, in quite a short time, I had come out into the road with the body. . . .

The superintendent took out a silver case, and offered me a cigarette. I took it, and noticed that his hands were as thin as his face, with the intricate patterns of the veins standing out bluely. Those hands made me vaguely apprehensive.

We leant back in our chairs and puffed. I was now, as the police put it, "off my guard." The next moment he would ask me questions, some dangerous questions, with a beautiful air of simplicity.

But I decided to forestall him.

"Sir."

"Yes?"

"I have worked with the police for years, and seen the mess people have got into trying to hide things which may be entirely irrelevant to the crime. I would like to revise my statement I have just made."

He looked disappointed.

"Well, what is it?"

"I didn't actually go past the gate at all. I stopped at the gate. Pulled the car up there, I mean."

"I see." He flicked his ash on the tray and leant forward. "Why did you do that?"

"I meant to go in and get an apple or two."

He smiled, rather wryly.

"Many people have been doing that lately. That's why the poor constable was there."

"Well, I wasn't to know that," I answered.

"No, of course not. By the way, you must have seen him at once."

"No, I didn't. I looked at the gate, it is true, but he must have been out of sight. You will find that the bottom of the gate is covered with brushwood. I couldn't have seen through it."

"And was it open?"

"I think it was, a little, but I honestly cannot be sure of that."

"Pity you don't remember. But it is a small point. Tell me, what did you do then?"

"I waited in the car for a bit."

"Conscience, I suppose."

"Partly. And I had also been driving a long while and thought I would rest. The rest was more important than the apples."

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He seemed to accept that quite naturally, and nodded. It would forestall anything a witness had seen.

"Then you got out? After how long?"

"Say two or three minutes. I moved over to the gate and saw him on the far side. I could not believe my eyes. It was so incongruous, a policeman lying on the grass without his helmet."

"You noticed that?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, I did."

"What did you do, exactly?"

"I went through and shouted, I think. Perhaps I didn't shout, but I have an idea I did. I ran round the gate and knelt by his side. I could see a cut in his wrist and there was quite a lot of blood about. I stood up and looked around. There was nobody to be seen. Then I tugged and carried him to the car and brought him down here as quickly as I could."

THE superintendent's blue eyes were upon me, wary and non-committal. He stubbed out his cigarette—I was only half through mine—and dusted his finger tips.

"An odd thing to do," he said.

"What was?"

"Well, with your experience, you should have known that the right thing to do was to leave the body just where it was."

"Yes, but I couldn't be sure he was dead," I interrupted.

"And gone to get help," he continued.

"There was no place in sight," I explained. "It might be a long time before help came. I don't say I thought it out at all. I acted instinctively. I remember being very anxious to get him into the car."

"I see you have blood on your clothes."

"Have I? Where?"

He asked me to raise my arm, and pointed to the elbow. There was a smudge of red there. He came round and looked at my knee. There was a smudge there, too.

"That must have been the kneeling and carrying," I said. Then: "Hardly what you would expect if I had done him in myself."

"No," he said. Then softly, again, "No."

We were silent for a while. He lit another cigarette.

"Tell me, what are you doing in this part of the country?"

"I was sacked, yesterday, and I am my own boss now, for a bit."

"A holiday, eh?"

"More or less."

"Were you going anywhere in particular?"

"No. Does that strike you as suspicious?"

"Not particularly. Why? You don't mind me asking you a few questions, do you?"

I was beginning to get angry.

"Not at all. Fire ahead. I would have preferred, of course, to get a word of thanks for what I did. But I can see now that I have put myself in a grave predicament. So much for trying to help a dying man. Suspecting is more in the police line than thanking, after all."

He flushed a little. Or it may have been my imagination.

"We have to eliminate, as you know. . . ."

And then the telephone rang. He picked it up. After a number of "Yes, yes, I sees," he laid it down again.

"What do you think happened?" he asked. "Wait. Have another cigarette?"

I took one, and he lit it.

"Have they found anything?" I asked. He shook his head.

"The razor?"

"No, not yet. But we will."

I wondered if they would. I didn't believe Napoleon would let go of the razor if he could help it.

"What about the truncheon?"

"The truncheon?"

"It was missing."

"Oh, you saw that, did you?"

"Yes," I said rather sharply. And then: "There's no wonder the police find crime so difficult. Any man who is not a deaf mute moron is up against it. If I say I noticed the truncheon was missing, there's a huge query hanging in the policeman's mind. One would think no one had the right to notice a thing like that except yourselves."

"Well, you were so upset, weren't you?" he said imperturbably. "I am surprised that you noticed that."

"Very suspicious," I said, sarcastically.

"Oh, come now. You know our little failings too well. You have worked with the Yard, and I would be interested to hear what you think happened."

It was all very disarming and put me more on my guard than ever.

"He must have been asleep," I suggested.

"Ye . . . es. But I hardly think so. He wasn't that sort of man."

"A warm day, a drink at the pub," I went on. "You never know. Anyway, I don't see how anyone could have gashed him in the way it was done unless he was asleep."

"But the helmet and the truncheon and the revolver . . . ." he began, then stopped.

"I had forgotten those. Where were they?"

He looked at me, meditatively.

"In the orchard. Well in."

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"The murderer could have thrown them there. After all, a man who murders a policeman because he catches him stealing apples may do anything."

"Ye . . . es. That is so. But as a matter of fact he was not asleep. The attack took place in the orchard, about thirty yards from the gate. That's where the blood begins. The helmet is ten yards further on, with the truncheon and the revolver close by. There's a trail of blood further in still, then he seems to have turned and made for the gate. He must have leant over the gate. There's a lot of blood there."

"Homicidal maniac?" I suggested.

"Possibly. But we'll get him. We'll get him." And for the first time I noticed a trace of emotion.

I didn't think they would get him. They would worry and worry and comb and stick to it, but they'd never get him. Napoleon was probably watching them at it that very moment.

I tried to imagine for a moment what would happen if I told him the truth. If this was the work of a homicidal maniac, was there any need to look further than to the man who retailed a story of that kind?

I got up.

"Well, I must get some tea. You don't mind if I go to the local hotel, do you?"

He looked embarrassed.

"Am I under suspicion?" I asked sharply. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't go?"

"You know quite well what the procedure is in such cases, Mr. Swan. Perhaps you would be good enough to give me some names and addresses so that I can verify what you have said?"

"One will be enough. Telephone Inspector Mac at the Yard. He will tell you that I am likely to murder a policeman for an apple. In the meantime . . . ."

"I shall be glad if you will take your tea here," said the superintendent.

"Motive," I mocked, "hunger. And by jove, I had forgotten. A sacked reporter creating his own news. Of course! How dull of me. I must get through to town later. There should be a pretty packet in this."

"Wouldn't you like to change your clothes?"

"It's as good a way of having me searched as any," I answered flippantly. "All right. Have my suit brought in."

THE constable showed me into another room. I changed, under his all-seeing eye. I begged him to notice I had no razor up my sleeve. He said nothing, did not smile, did not grin.

I felt, myself, it was in bad taste, but I was getting riled.

Another constable brought in tea. I munched away at a stale bun and some thick bread and butter. The sergeant came in for a cup.

"Nice pickle this, for a self-respecting reporter," I said.

"Um, um," said the sergeant, through a bun.

"Thought I was doing a good turn, you know. One lives and learns."

"Nice chap, Bill," said the sergeant. "Got a wife and kid."

I felt ashamed. I have never been half as tough as I pretended.

"Sorry, Sergeant."

"That's all right. It doesn't mean the same to you, naturally."

"No. I've been thinking of myself. One doesn't like being suspected."

"That's natural," said the sergeant. "But you shouldn't worry. We've got to clear things up."

"Yes," I said.

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LANOLIN

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A constable came in and asked me to see the superintendent.

I walked into the other room. He held the receiver out to me.

"Inspector Mac wants to speak to you."

I took the receiver from his hand.

"Hello, Mac!"

"Hello, you! What sort of a stink have you been getting into?"

"Helping the police, as usual."

"Doing them in, I hear. You should have heard the character I gave you. Oh, boy!"

"Brimstone, was it?"

"You bet."

"Has the Yard been called in?"

"Not giving anything away to the hounds. But no doubt we shall be, unless they hang you first. And if we are called in, look out."

"All right. I shall. You might as well hang me as the next wrong man."

"Seems bad, doesn't it? Don't like these attacks on the police. Got a theory?"

"Nothing beyond a tramp."

"No good. By the way, what became of those rats and chickens? Didn't see your yarn in the paper."

I felt a sudden chill about the heart. What was Mac after? He was no fool.

"Caught the chickens and boiled 'em," I answered lightly.

Mac laughed, so I knew it was all right.

"What are you going to do now? Cash in on this, and then?"

"Come home, as quick as I can."

"We'll have dinner," said Mac. "Make it soon."

"All right," and he rang off.

"Well?" I asked the superintendent. "Does this let me out?"

"Yes," he said. I could see he had already almost forgotten me. He was thinking of other things.

"Are you taking his word?"

"No." He jerked up his head. "There never has been a case against you, except the one you made against yourself by your manner."

That was a nasty hit. He was a cold fish at heart.

"Thought it was perfect," I murmured. He glanced at me quickly, and I thought it would do no good to play around too much.

I wondered why he was letting me go. They had no doubt been able to verify that I had not gone beyond the gate. There was the lack of motive and weapon. It would be too much of a good thing to submit that I had raided the orchard armed with a razor. There was the help I had given. Murderers do not usually pile the corpse on a car and take it round to the nearest station. I began to wonder why they didn't. And no doubt there was what Mac had said. I have never struck anyone as a homicidal maniac.

And so long as they didn't find the razor, and trace it to me, I was more or less safe. I hoped fervently that Napoleon would hold on to it.

I trembled to think what would happen if he left it hanging around.

And where, in any case, was Napoleon?

"I am sorry it was necessary to keep you so long," said the superintendent stiffly. For a moment that thin, stringy hand rested in mine. And I walked out.

I went to the offices of the local paper and borrowed a typewriter. I can barely write without a typewriter and in the rush of departure had left my portable at home. The "boys" were curious, but asked no questions. Later, of course, they realized that I had stolen the story from under their very noses.

I cashed in, as Mac said. But I had another story in my hand, a story worth a thousand pounds and a long holiday. And I dared not use it.

The next day there was a note from the superintendent. It was cautiously worded, but was really a permission to go home, if I wanted to.

I did want to, badly. I had a vague notion that Napoleon would come and look for me. That night I slept with locked door and closed windows. And always, as I passed a shrubby front garden, my eye would wander.

I drove back to London another way, giving a wide berth to the orchard. Napoleon was a patient little fellow. I could not be sure that he was not expecting me, still.

I prayed that I had seen the last of him.

LONDON, for all its creeping autumn fogs, looked familiar and lovable. There is no better lit town in the world for a man who goes in fear. I was not exactly afraid, but there was anxiety in the hinterland of my brain. Napoleon knew where I lived. (I remembered with alarm the glance he had given at the street plaque.)

Napoleon had been ordered by Solomon to kill anyone who saw him. And I was not dead yet.

I wished that I could fathom the little fellow's processes of thought. Would he make for London, the razor clutched tightly in his hand, and seek me out? Or would he go home, wherever that was, to obtain instructions from his master?

I did not know, I could not guess. I

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bought a torch, was very wary at the garage and on the dark stairs in the house. I even considered changing my rooms, but decided against it. It was no good getting into a panic.

Back in town I bought a paper. The Press was in full voice. The case of the "Orchard Slasher," as it came to be called, was, after its own heart, a purple patch in the pervading propaganda grey. A policeman had been killed—how many rejoiced, I wondered?—and there were elements of mystery. The force was obviously doing all it could. But when I had discounted the fertile imagination of this reporter and that (and I knew them all), there was no news of any kind. Absolutely no news. Tramps were rounded up. The known criminals and suspected maniacs were investigated. But not a clue. All papers steered clear of any suggestion of political motives. They knew the censor would rap them hard.

It was obvious that the case would fizzle out without even a passable theory. Sooner or later the police would turn back to me as the only rational possibility. I would be grilled and bullied endlessly. Police methods, since the revolution, had coarsened considerably. And I didn't like it.

I had dinner in Soho and went to bed.

During the morning I was down at the Department of Overseas Trade, hunting for statistics. I forget what it was, something about coffee in Brazil, I believe. I had lunch with a police reporter at Victoria. He rather overdid a studious avoidance of the murder.

I took a bus up to Charing Cross. It was from the upper deck that I saw the newspaper seller. He was selling busily, ripping paper after paper from his bundle and emitting hoarse shouts that might have meant anything. Through a gap in the passers-by I read the placard across his knees.

THE SLASHER AGAIN.

That was all. I pressed a penny on the conductor, and dropped neatly off. The road was full of traffic. I darted across, jay running, and bought a paper. My hands were trembling.

There it was, across the front page. There had been another murder. At Chester, this time.

I folded the paper and walked along until I came to a café. The waitress brought coffee, and I sat down to read.

Napoleon had done it again.

Early that morning, about seven, a Mr. Thomas Martle (details: thirty-seven, married, electrician. Photograph inset, a pleasant full-blown face with protruding ears) had been walking along the main road to Chester. A lorry was drawn up on the left side of the road. As he passed he noticed that the headlamps were on. This made him wonder, for it was broad daylight. He had shouted, but there was no answer. He shouted again.

"It struck me a bit funny," said Mr. Martle. "I stood there hesitating, thinking it was none of my own business, but still kind of wondering. Then I walked back to the lorry and thought I would turn the lights off, at least. So I mounted the step and peered over into the driving pit. And there he was, lying all crumpled up."

Martle had shaken him by the shoulder, but there was no response. At first he had thought him asleep, but the curious way he was lying did not look like sleep.

"I was most careful not to touch anything," Mr. Martle went on.

The moment he knew the man was dead he had legged it to the nearest house. This happened to be a middle-class residence with a telephone. The owner had immediately telephoned the police.

And there it was, all over again, the slashings. The carotid had been cut, and both arteries at the wrists. The man had bled to death. There was no doubt about it. The murderer had repeated his performance.

Details in the early edition were scanty. I bought edition after edition as they appeared. In the next the unfortunate man's name was given. But the most startling news of all was in the late night final.

They had found the razor.

But this in itself had an element of fantasy. The razor had been discovered high up in an elm tree fifty yards from the scene of the crime. It was mere chance that a policeman's eye had caught the glint of sunshine on the blade. The tree had been climbed, with some difficulty, and the razor taken away for examination. There was no doubt but that it was the actual razor used for the slashings. The paper hinted darkly at finger-prints, and prophesied optimistically, "an early arrest."

I KNEW with certainty that it was Napoleon's work. I wondered in what manner the unfortunate driver had caught

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sight of him. Death had followed swiftly.

Soon after five I arrived at my digs. The Irish girl told me that a "gentleman was after waiting for me upstairs."

He was from the Yard. I saw that the moment I entered. I also saw various other things, a slight disarray amongst my books. A corner of the carpet was turned back. He had profited by my absence for a thorough overhaul.

"I am from Scotland Yard," he said.

I waved him to a chair.

"You've been searching my room, I see."

He did not deny it. Neither did he affirm it. He smiled pleasantly. Eton and New College. One of the new variety.

"Did you notice that my razor is still there?" I asked. "But perhaps you don't know the latest. Look at this."

And I handed him the paper.

"That's odd," he said.

"What is?"

"The thing being up a tree. I wouldn't have thought a man who had just murdered someone would have climbed a tree."

"Perhaps he threw it up," I suggested. "An open razor might stay up if the edge bit into the bark."

"Um . . . perhaps."

"So you still suspect me of that crime in the orchard?"

He smiled even more pleasantly, if that were possible.

"The usual routine, you know. Everybody guilty until proved innocent. Shall we get it over?" He produced a notebook, ruffled the leaves, took a pencil from his breast pocket, and waited.

"My movements, I suppose?"

He nodded.

"You've forgotten something."

"Have I?"

"You must wet the pencil on your tongue, you know."

"That's cut out of regulations now. Fire ahead."

I told him where I had been the night before, what time I had come in, gone to bed and been roused by Lucy with the early morning cup of tea. No, I had not been out in the car. No, I had not traveled by train.

"As a matter of fact," I ended, "I do not propose to tell you how I committed this second murder. Most ingenious."

"I am sure it was." He grinned.

"I really do know how it was done, you know."

At that moment, oddly enough, there was but the thinnest wall between me and confession. If the young man had looked at all interested, I would have told him. It might be difficult to explain to the police why I had kept my mouth shut so long and therefore been responsible, in a way, for the second murder. But unless I spoke now it would get more and more difficult. The longer I delayed the more censorious the police would become.

"All theories gratefully accepted," said the detective.

"It may have been done by an animal," I suggested.

"Or a bird." He grinned. "That would account for the razor being up a tree. Dropped from its beak, you know."

"All right," I said, rather sulkily.

"No, but honestly . . ." he began, seeing the look on my face.

"Of course, I was kidding. I've already tried to help the police. Result, whenever a murder is committed anywhere I suppose I shall find you on my doorstep."

"Oh, only for a bit. You'll soon get used to it."

"Have a drink?"

"No, thanks. I've got to see that Irish girl now to confirm your statements."

"The hell you have," I said and pushed him out of the door. Some of the police were still human, so long as you got them on their own, out of sight.

CHAPTER THREE

I HAD dinner with Mac that evening, in Charlotte Street. We had arranged to meet at a quarter past seven, but he was late. He did not turn up until half past. I waited for him in the car, smoking and wondering. Mac is not usually late. Time with him is an obsession. I was uneasy about Mac.

At last the well known bowler and rolled umbrella hove in sight. Off duty he looked a compromise between a stockbroker and his own head clerk. He veers from both, vaguely.

He has a habit of pulling on his nose, a remarkably large and solid nose for a thin, angular, ironic face. He has gone to great trouble to develop a simple, naïve expression. But it does not take one in.

"Think I dare leave that car here?" I asked.

"I'm off duty. If you get in trouble I shan't help you. By the way, I'm sorry I'm late. Lots of work."

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Mac's taste in food is simple. After looking in vain for a beef-steak he ordered an escalope de veau Napolitaine. I had a rabbit en cocotte, and added a bottle of Chateau Neuf du Pape for both of us.

"In funds?" Mac asked.

"Not particularly. Why?"

He jerked a finger at the wine.

"Thought you might have made a good thing out of the orchard slasher." He has a staccato way of speaking.

I found myself extraordinarily unwilling to discuss that case. A waitress hurried up with the food and slammed it down hastily.

"I'm worried about this slashing," Mac continued.

"Can't the Yard make heads or tails of it?"

"No," said Mac. And "No," again. "Whole business is mad."

"It probably is a madman."

"You don't really believe that, Swan?"

"Isn't it only madmen who murder without a motive, or for trivial, irrational reasons? What man in his senses would kill for an apple, or slash a lorry driver...."

"And then climb a tree to hide the weapon?"

"Or show it," I said. "It might have been that, you know."

Mac looked at me.

"Hadn't thought of that. It might. It might. Exhibitionism. Pride. Every little thing like that is a signpost to the rascal's mind."

I didn't think that a dozen signposts would be of the least use to the police.

"What did you mean when you said it had been done by an animal?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing," I said quickly. "By the way, have you established a connection between the two murders?"

I had been looking for this in the newspapers, but had drawn blank. The papers took it for granted that the murders were the work of the same man, because of the instrument used. I wanted to find if the police knew anything further.

"There's the razor," said Mac. "Both cases. And . . . listen. That lorry passed during the night through Evesham. Stopped at a garage there to get a plug. Driver said he'd had trouble two or three miles down the road. I believe . . . well, I don't know."

"Out with it."

"Speaking confidentially, mark you. Don't want this across the front page tomorrow morning."

"Okay by me. Mum's the word."

"I believe the murderer got on that lorry. Must have been hiding all the time near the scene of his first crime. Can't imagine how he did it. The local police combed the place. Physical impossibility for a man to hide. And yet . . . fellow did. Not a doubt of it."

"And then?" Mac was getting uncomfortably close.

"Driver saw him. Or something. And the fellow slashed."

"And the tree?"

And immediately I had asked the question I regretted it. Mac would swerve back to the same question, the one I wanted to avoid.

"That idea of yours, an animal. . . ."

"I was pulling your man's leg, you know. Besides, the whole thing's fantastic."

"Don't know so much," mused Mac.

"But animals don't carry razors! Hell, it's ridiculous!"

"Performing animals?"

There was an odd, questioning look in his eye. He was on the scent of something.

"But what performing animal could possibly hold a razor?" I objected. "Seals? Bears? Dogs? What other performing animals are there?"

"What about a monkey?"

"I don't know. It might be a monkey, I suppose."

I was sweating gently.

"You see," said Mac, "there are curious marks on the razor. Bits of finger-prints. Damned odd bits. Department can't make heads or tails of them. Might be monkeys, you know."

"Tell me about the finger-prints."

"They don't fit. Not with anything known. Too tiny, just like an animal's, if animals have fingerprints. Department's puzzled to blazes."

I POURED him out some more wine.

"I remember reading a Thorndyke story in which the finger-prints had been faked with a rubber stamp. Suppose someone faked finger-prints, ones which couldn't possibly exist?"

"Possible, but improbable," Mac summed up.

"Devil of a sight more probable than a performing monkey gone berserk."

"Don't know about that."

That glint was still in his eye.

"You've got something up your sleeve, Mac."

"No, nothing." He put on his most com-

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placently naïve expression. I wanted to laugh.

"It ought to be easy enough to find out if a performing monkey is missing," I said.

"If the owner wanted it known," Mac said sharply.

"But surely, if the man had lost a monkey, and suspected this. . . ."

"All the more reason for keeping shut about it."

I reflected that I was keeping shut myself about it, with less connection than the owner of the monkey would have.

Mac ordered coffee—black—and lit a cigarette.

"Matter of fact," he said, "Yard had a scare about performing animals."

I knew what was coming and held tight.

"You remember that rat and chicken business?" He smiled grimly.

"Why, what was at the back of that?" I tried to sound non-committal.

"By the way, never saw your story."

"I didn't think there was anything to it. It sounded too cock-and-bull even for the papers."

"Was that it? I wondered why you hadn't sent it in."

This was dangerous ground.

"How about it?" I asked.

"Yard wouldn't have made such a fuss if we hadn't known something. That struck *you*, didn't it?" He gave me a quick glance. "Had a letter, you know. Anonymous. Postmark—Euston. Odd letter. Sounds quite Biblical. 'And the animals shall perform to my enrichment and their surpassing loss.' Sounded nonsense to me. But somebody suggested it might not be a bad idea to train monkeys to pick pockets and commit burglaries. As if," said Mac indignantly, "we hadn't got enough trouble in that line already."

"It isn't a bad idea," I mused.

"It might work," he admitted ruefully. "For a bit. Anyway, when this man comes along with a yarn about a van and rats chasing the driver, we thought . . . well, you never know, do you?"

"No, you don't."

"Suppose," Mac went on, "one of these monkeys got lost or something in the hurly burly. Quite natural. Might have hopped on a lorry and hidden. In fact," he shot out suddenly, "might have gone in your car to Evesham."

"Mac!"

"Well, you were up at the waterworks that evening. Might have picked you up then."

"But hell . . . !" I tried to look as shocked and astounded as I could.

"Might have."

"But he couldn't, Mac. He couldn't possibly have hidden there all day. I had my baggage in the back of the car," I added.

"Does sound impossible."

"And besides . . . the razor?"

"There is that. But . . . you see, a monkey might have hidden near the scene of the crime. Lain low. Up a tree, perhaps. And it would account for the razor being found where it was. Oh, hell, I don't know."

He passed a hand wearily over his brow.

"Finish your coffee," I said.

"All right. Then I've got to get back to the Yard. Lots of work." He looked around and lowered his voice. "It isn't so much crime as all this damned political work that is getting me down."

I drove him back to the Yard in my car.

On the way uptown again I parked the car before the Forum Cinema, in Villiers Street, and climbed up the steps to the top of Hungerford Bridge. There, in an embrasure, with my arms resting on the cold balustrade, I looked at the river scene, watched the trolley buses, "lit galleons," roaring along the Embankment; saw the moon face of Big Benzine clock on Shell Mex House, and in the distance, in the rosy night air, the bulk of St. Paul's looming up. The still waters held unwaveringly the reflections of the street lamps on the Surrey side, swords laid across the river, accusing fingers tapering towards me. . . .

If Mac ever connected me with Napoleon. . . . But it was a long, long jump from a monkey to Napoleon. Mac would have to leap ravines of profound unbelief. But sooner or later, one of those small beings would disclose himself, would be captured, perhaps found dead. . . . A thousand accidents were possible. And then Mac would snap to attention like a guardsman. He would remember the performing animals. That odd letter would never be out of his mind. And he would know, beyond need of proof, that I had carried one of them in my car as far as the orchard and seen the policeman meet his death.

Accessory after the fact. . . . Or was it before the fact?

If I were to tell Mac the sober truth, now, he would not believe me. No one would believe me. Belief in a man, intelligent, a foot high . . . no, it was too much to expect.

But once the major difficulty was jumped, once a little man had indisputably

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been found, that would be different. Mac would know I had carried him in the car; suspect that I knew I was carrying him; know for a fact that I had witnessed the attack on the policeman, and afterwards cloaked him from justice. Of what use would it be then . . . even now? . . . to say I had been virtually kidnapped, been forced to do the little fellow's will? Through fear of a razor. My razor.

I regretted bitterly that I had not made a clean breast to the police at Evesham. But I did not know then that Napoleon would clear me of suspicion by committing a second murder. If I had told my story, and Napoleon had simply disappeared, I would have hanged. Or, at the least, spent the remainder of my life in a lunatic asylum.

There was nothing to be done. I must sit mum, quiet as death. I dared not disclose what I knew.

A woman touched me on the elbow. I started, shook my head, and walked down the steps again. For the next hour and a half I watched a Roumanian picture at the Forum and forgot myself and my entanglements.

When, about a quarter to twelve, I got to my digs in Marchmont Street, the Irish girl came pattering up from the basement.

"Gentleman is after waiting for you upstairs," she said.

"Hell," I muttered.

I considered it about time the police let go of me. Even Mac's dinner had not been entirely social. He had done some pretty pumping. . . .

I felt, going up the stairs, that I was going to be very rude to Eton and New College when I got to him.

I OPENED the door in a thoroughly combative mood, and pulled up short on the threshold. The man who rose from the armchair with a heave of his body was a stranger, and certainly no policeman. He had made himself comfortable in my absence, had lit the gas fire, piled the back of his chair with cushions from the divan. A thriller from my bookcase lay, back up, on the occasional table. And he had served himself a drink. Oh, he had made himself at home all right, taken largish liberties, and my hackles rose.

"Good evening," I said, short, curt, and truculent.

"Good evening." He had a deep, booming voice, and was not the least put out.

I tried to sum him up.

He was about forty years of age, perhaps more, for it is difficult to guess with fat men. And he was overflowing with fat. It was congealed on his face in large, round masses; it cascaded under his chin and froze in terraces there. It was protuberant in his paunch. The high forehead seemed taut and innocent of it. The full nose below was a vast kneaded blob of fat. His lips, rich and Cupid red, were overshadowed by a heavy moustache.

"The beastly little sensualist. . . ." I said to myself. And then saw the eyes.

The eyes were remarkable. His hair, ragged and scanty where the skin of his brow ran like promontories into the scalp, was dark. But the eyes were blue, the light, flitting blue I have seen in mystics and fanatics. They were sharply defined and clear eyes, borrowing a strange impressiveness in contrast with the shapeless face. They belied the fat altogether, gave a fresh and different impression of the man. He might, indeed, be the sensualist I had guessed him. But he was other things as well. Other uncomfortable things. . . .

"My name is Pusey," he boomed. "Alexander Pusey." And he made a dramatic, or was it a mocking? little bow from the waist.

I could see that he was totting me up, too. Not a difficult matter, I should think.

"Please sit down. Can I find you another drink?"

I stressed "another," but he ignored it and sank into the armchair. There was an odd impression of overflow about his arms.

"I smoke a pipe." He swayed heavily to one side, and after rummaging in his sports jacket pulled one out.

"Sorry I have no tobacco to offer you," I said, still a trifle ironical.

He dismissed that deficiency with a pardoning gesture.

Mr. Pusey went through the slow ritual of filling up from an old pouch, struck a match and held it, fizzling brightly, in his hand.

"Where," he asked with sudden explosive force, "is your razor?"

My heart seemed to stand still and race again, flooding my ears with a muffled rush of blood. My eyes jumped desperately to his face. He was calmly applying the match to the bowl, sucking in the smoke noisily and emitting it in short, rapid puffs.

"What razor?" But my voice came from a distance, like a ventriloquist's.

"Come now. You had three razors. Three.

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One safety, and two cut-throats. Did you hear, cut-throats? Cut . . . throats." And he sniggered meaningly.

But he was not looking at me. He was gazing blankly into the red of the gas fire.

"No," I denied. "I had . . . I have only one cut-throat."

He smacked his hands together and turned swiftly towards me.

"What have you done with the other?"

I attempted to turn upon him.

"I suppose it amuses you to ask these nonsensical questions. You are not from the Yard, are you?"

He spread his legs out and crossed them, scissorwise. Two fat fingers pinched up an edge of old flannel trousers, and he laughed.

"Looks like it, does it not?"

"No," I admitted, "but if not . . . from the Party?"

He shook his head.

My mind was winging on. If he was not from the police, not from the Party, why had he come? And where had he obtained his information? What was his game?"

"I want to know about that razor." His finger wagged threateningly under my nose. "Yes, I want to know. You had it the day before you left. And now, it is gone. Where is it? Come."

Blackmail. Was it blackmail?

I had always said: "If any man ever tries to blackmail me, I shall go straight to the police." I remembered it now.

There was a quick mocking smile about his mouth. He was enjoying himself. I wanted to lean forward and treat the flabby overflow of his cheek as he had treated his trousers. It was difficult not to lean forward and nip.

"I never had another razor," I shouted. And was appalled lest someone should have heard.

HE UNCROSSED his legs and rubbed his hands before the fire.

"Oh, yes, you had. Don't deny it. It is no *use* denying it. You took it with you and had it on you when the constable was attacked. Come, I advise you to make a clean breast of it."

"So you think I did the job?" I mocked.

He made a vague gesture with his hand. A ring on his third finger glittered in the light. I was regaining control. This could only be guesswork, and I had to bluff it out.

"And the other murder as well, I suppose?"

He blew a neat smoke ring and watched it spiral towards the ceiling.

"Have you told the police about the razor?"

"I've told them everything."

"What!" He slapped his hands dramatically on his knees and stared at me, the pipe jutting out straight from his mouth.

"Everything," I repeated.

"About Napoleon, too?"

There was a dark silence. I remained clamped to my chair, motionless. He was gazing at me, his eyes screwed up. I do not know how long we remained like that. The silence was broken by his laugh.

"Solomon!" I said, dumbfounded.

"No! No! No! But you know, eh?"

"The driver, then?"

He nodded.

"You haven't told the police everything, have you?"

"No," I said.

I got up and fetched a glass, poured out two stiff drinks, added a splash of soda, and drank mine at a gulp. I filled up again and took the drink over to my chair.

"Good health," he said, lifting the glass a trifle. He took a sip and put it down again.

"Damn you," I swore. "Damn you."

He was rather pleased than otherwise.

"Damn you," I said again.

"Let it pass," he said, just as if I had now sufficiently apologised. "You are a journalist, eh?"

"A reporter," I corrected. Reporters don't call themselves journalists. They leave that to the women who write cat stuff about their friends."

"What paper?"

"Sacked. The day I met Napoleon."

"No connection, I hope?"

"Not really."

I still felt dazed, and answered the questions automatically. There had been a beastly feeling of strangulation about the noose he was drawing around my neck. Now relief came flooding slowly. This man, he wouldn't give me away. He would want to keep things as dark as he could. He would keep his mouth shut, like me.

"Nap get home all right?" I asked casually.

"Yes, quite safe."

"How did he manage it, after the second murder? That also was his work, wasn't it?"

"Of course." He took another sip at his drink. "I knew he had done it again the

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moment I saw the papers. I was not certain about the policeman in the orchard. It was about fifty-fifty, you or Napoleon. By the way, why didn't you tell the police, then?"

"They thought it was the work of a homicidal maniac," I explained. "There would have been no need to look further for the maniac if I had told them that yarn."

"Quite. Quite. I see the difficulty. As it happened, it would have been all right."

"After the second murder, you mean?"

He nodded.

"But I wasn't to know he would so obligingly let me out of the bag by doing it again."

"No, of course not. Well, as I was telling you, the moment I saw the second account I knew it must be Napoleon. So I took my car and ran it around the area. He was bound to be there, somewhere, looking for a chance lift in the right direction. And he was. I took him back."

"Pleased with himself, no doubt," I said bitterly.

"Pleased as punch."

"And you gave him a medal and clapped him on the back, I suppose!"

He was ruffled by that.

"I am no more murderous than anyone else," he protested.

"But you, or Solomon, had ordered him to kill anyone who saw him!"

"True, but he had been given orders that he was not to be seen by anyone."

"Ah, that lets you out." I was beginning to get into a temper. "You can shrug your shoulders. You . . . you didn't see that policeman running, didn't hear his cries."

"Have another peg."

I WAS beginning to dislike his complacency intensely.

"You murdered him . . . and the lorry man," I said.

"There is so much involved. You can't understand," he said musingly. Then he turned with dramatic ferocity. "Go and tell the police about that razor."

"You know I can't. They've got me in a trap. But I wish you had seen that bobby's face. . . ."

"I can." He screwed up his eyes again, and seemed to be concentrating on the far distance. "Quite clearly," he added, then turned to me. "A sentimentalist, eh? Well, well, I confess it is disappointing. I had

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hoped . . ." a shrug of the shoulders, "but it doesn't matter."

He knocked his pipe noisily on the ash tray and got up.

"I must be going."

He heaved himself up out of the chair, crossed to the divan and picked up an old raincoat.

"There are two of us who know about them now," I said. And then, with studied calmness: "And I have the advantage of knowing *you*."

He cames towards me, light on his feet, which was somehow surprising.

"Cards on the table," he said curtly. "You can put the police on my track. Good. And I can drop them a line, anonymously, about the razor. They would soon fish out the facts. And if they come after me, there will be no trace of Napoleon and the rest. Not a trace. You can try it if you like. After all," he squinted at me menacingly, "it would not be a bad idea, so far as I am concerned. In some ways you are a danger, and if you care to remove yourself, it may save me the trouble."

"And the second murder?" I asked.

"All murders are imitated. What, after all, is there to connect the second with the first, except the way it was done?"

Yes, there was that, certainly. The police would find it easier to hang me than to believe in the story I had to tell. I said nothing.

"Tell the police about Napoleon. See if they believe you."

"I think they would," I said slowly, talking more to myself than to him.

"Why?" His face was dead serious, the brow drawn down over the eyes, the mouth still.

I didn't think any good would come of spinning my yarn to the police. It would be hopeless. Already I was succumbing, and always, at the back of my mind, was curiosity, the desire to fathom this strange business. I didn't decide to tell him what I knew. I just found myself saying it.

"They suspect something of the sort already," I said.

"The devil they do!"

He threw his raincoat on the divan again and sat down. I could see that he was preparing to talk and still wondering if it was wise.

"Talking to you is like talking to a dead man," he said. "I mean that you're as good as dead. I can kill you when I want to, by letting the police know about the razor and hiding the . . . them."

He paused, and I said nothing.

"I am on to a bigger thing than I can deal with," he continued, slowly, and earnestly. "A huge big thing. A miracle has happened. As you know. There hasn't been anything like it for the last twenty million years. It is even more remarkable than you think. Napoleon is incredible enough, but the others, some of the others. . . ." He hesitated and fumbled for words.

"Quite fantastically incredible."

"Have another drink," I said. But he waved the suggestion aside.

"I am on my own."

"Except for the mother," I said. "And Solomon."

"The devil! You know about her, too! But Solomon is one of them."

"Oh! I hadn't realized that."

"I want help," he went on simply. "I *must* get help. And it is so damnably dangerous, especially now this has happened. Before, I was afraid to approach anybody. People are so prejudiced. They are such revolting hysterical fools. But you . . . you seem to have been thrown in my path. And you are lassoed very neatly. There are good reasons why you should not give the game away."

I nodded agreement.

"I want to discuss things," he said slowly. "I must *discuss* things. Sooner or later it will all come out, and we must be prepared."

I noticed the use of the plural.

"A sort of miracle," and he lifted a hand and dropped it again. "That's what it is, a miracle, an odd, unlooked for accident. And there are immense potentialities. I see no end to the possibilities. But I am not a practical man myself. Just a born dreamer." He slapped his fat thigh at this and set it quivering. "I want to check up with somebody, get ballast. My imagination runs away with me. There was that foolish affair of the letter, for example."

"That is what set the Yard on your track," I said.

"Nonsense, they are not on my track."

"A parallel track, then."

"What exactly do they know?"

I told him about my talk with Inspector Mac.

"What they have in mind is some kind of performing animal. A monkey is the nearest they've got, so far. 'The animals shall perform. . . .' You remember the letter?"

"A silly piece of bravado," he said. "I didn't want to descend upon them with-

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out warning. An odd bit of chivalry, but there it is. Already, you see, I am guilty of a foolish mistake."

He mused a moment over this.

"But there is no particular danger?" he went on. "After all, it is a tremendous leap from a performing monkey to Napoleon. It isn't a leap the official mind is likely to make."

"I've seen Napoleon," I agreed, "but at any moment I am prepared to wake up and find I have been dreaming."

"You must join me," he said. "I can't go on with it on my own. I must have help. As it is, I don't know what to do, how to set about things. Napoleon says you are not hysterical. The way you've dealt with the police shows you have grit. . . . As a reporter, it should appeal to you. Not that you can say or write anything yet. But some day, perhaps.... There *should* be someone to chronicle the advent of Minimum Man."

It was the first time I ever heard the term.

Perhaps it was the first time it was ever used.

"Are you up in town long?" I asked.

"I came up to see you. No. I go back as soon as possible. I don't like deserting the colony for long. How about running you back in the morning? You are clear of the police, aren't you?"

"I think so. I told Mac tonight that I might disappear for a while."

"Good. Shall it be the early morning, then?"

"All right," I said. "Come round about nine and pick me up."

He stood up and shook me, rather emotionally, by the hand. A moment later he was gone.

And, there was I, committed. I didn't know what to make of him. He attracted me, in a way. I was prejudiced in his favour by his fat. Fat people get away with it, and he looked like a well-blown tire. I liked his complacent, pneumatic look; liked, too, that odd mixture of vanity and energy and hesitation, with a touch of drama thrown in. An odd fellow, I decided, not half so simple as he appeared. The last of the romantics, perhaps. Anyway, he promised fun.

And I was tired of London, of the daily round of crime and puerilities which made up my life, tired of adding colour to the sordid inanities which Jellaby and his men considered the proper mental diet for readers.

I wanted a change.

CURIOUSLY enough, suspecting perhaps a private grief over leaving London and my job, his conversation turned in the morning on the Press.

He called at nine, exactly, in his Ford V-8. I had not suspected that, from the look of him. An Austin Seven would have been more in tone. He looked fresh and bulgy, oddly benign and archbishopy. I threw my luggage into the capacious boot at the back and got in. There was a flutter of curtain from the lower room. The Irish girl, no doubt.

"The Press," he said, as if setting a thesis. "I rarely read a paper now. Death and disaster, calamities by land and sea, insurgencies abroad and chaos at home, no, I cannot read them. They don't reflect anything real, merely the private fears and hysterias of mugwumps.

"So damned depressing," he went on. "Press and depress.... Good motto, what? When I was a school master I was fool enough to read out selected bits to the boys. Thought it would be good for them to keep in touch with contemporary realities. But it became increasingly difficult to detect any reality. Malaise, defeatism, nothing constructive anywhere. Do you realize," he waited a moment to overtake a lorry, "that the average sheet is nothing but a chronicle of destruction?"

"You can't tell me much about the Press," I said.

"Take marriage," he said. "Nothing, I suppose, could be more constructive than that. It's the very scaffolding which makes all human building possible. Very well, then. In my morning paper I read that Mr. Smith has hit his wife in the jaw. Mr. Smith has deserted his wife. Mr. Smith announces that he will not pay his wife's bills. Mr. Smith has been divorced from her. Mr. Smith has murdered her, as likely as not. Any boy or girl reading that must have a pretty picture of marriage. They must wonder why people are fools enough to dabble in it. Sheer destruction. All chronicled marriage is a knockabout at a fair. And not a word about the other side, the kisses and caresses and normalities. Not a word. If Mr. Smith wants to let the readers know that he and his wife have brought a reasonable, bright-eyed morsel into this holocaust of assorted disasters, he has to pay for it. Pay! Advertise it, by heaven!"

"You are doing over thirty," I said. "We don't want to be pulled up by the police."

"So I am! All right. I'll go slow for a bit."

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Coasting down the North Circular road I noticed how quick his reactions were. He drove with verve and precision.

During that journey across the face of England I learnt a little about him. He dropped his information here and there, inconsequently. Sometimes he gave a slab of his career, then dropped it to talk of something else, to point out some mass of yellowing leaf in the sunshine. I gathered that he had been London born. His parents owned a newsagent's shop near Shepherd's Bush. They were thrifty and concise about money, without being mean. His boyhood was bound up with memories of sweets, endless sweets given him by an adoring mother. There had been incipient fat even then. Fatty, they had called him at school, and he had rather liked it.

It had been a noisy, overcrammed elementary school with a perpetual feud between the more or less genteel, and the out and out Cockney buccaneers from the poorer districts. There was plenty of material there for sharpening the wits, and he had managed, by reason of his fat, to keep clear of fisticuffs. The classes, of course, were grossly overcrowded, as many as forty to one harassed teacher. But he did not think that mattered, much. A growing boy needed to be protected from officious spoon feeding. And one could hide in a large class very effectively. One came through more or less unscathed.

It had been worse, on the whole, in the secondary school. There had been a beast of a head, a monster who lived for and by examinations. There, he had been a statistic, with examinations as a recurring decimal. It hurt, this process. And one of the masters had conceived no less than ten different gibes about fat, and none of them very good. He remembered an uneasy feeling of being driven and smothered. The fat boy had been through a period of private blubbings and scare. At one time he had suspected his own sanity, and had secretly read up abnormal psychology in a horrifying book. But that somehow faded away in the advent of First Love, a comic affair, so it seemed now, of peepings and stealthy retreats. She served downstairs, at the counter, a calm, static blonde of seventeen with a mind like a mashed tomato. It had never gone further than one squeeze of the hand and an anonymous love letter.

He had matriculated at London University. And then his mother died. That had been a blow. What drive there had been in his life had come from his mother. It was she who had propelled him towards the respectability of the professions. She must have been singularly small-minded in her way (he said), narrow and rigid, with a Victorian mistrust of commerce and a compensating snobbish desire for fulfilment in her son. His father had never meant anything to him. There was a picture, quite meaningless, in his mind, of a small, bald man peering through glasses at account books, and then suddenly looking over the glasses, rather suspiciously. And a certain amount of thoughtful—or was it calculating—jingling of coins in the trousers pocket.

The University had been a revelation, another world. Here, for the first time, he had come across objective scholarship, interest for interest's sake. And he had liked that. He had somehow taken the easy road of literature and languages, but he had been aware of all sorts of other things alongside. There were exciting peeps at the science laboratories, for example, and talk, plenty of talk, all mixed up with larkings, and an occasional cheap dinner in Soho with the wine going to his head. His father had agreed to let him live in digs nearer the University, and after that, there had been experiments, with beer, with theatres, music halls, and girls. It was very mixed, and stimulating. And he was getting fatter all the time.

WHEN he did get his pass degree he took the easy road again. He had gone in for teaching. It would be more exact to say that teaching had sucked him in. Ten years that had lasted. Ten years. . . . He didn't want to speak about those years.

His father had died suddenly and very surprisingly had left seven thousand pounds. Going through the formalities of succession he discovered that his father had been a gambler, and a fortunate one, in shares. He could never reconcile that with what he knew of his father. It was just irreconcilable, but there it was. One never knew with people.

Seven thousand pounds at five per cent was three hundred and fifty. He could live on that. He had promptly given in his notice and gone for a holiday, out west. There he had seen an old, rambly, tottering house in the hills and bought it. That was six years ago. And he had been living there ever since. It was there he had come across Minimum Man.

"How?" I asked.

"Let us have lunch," he answered evasively.

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She stretched out a leg, and for a time we both looked at it, critically.

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We drew in at an R.A.C. hotel and had lunch. He was a voracious and discriminating eater. There was a querulous fuss about the beer, which was not to his taste, and the manager was called about the coffee. He did himself well.

"Take the coffee into the garden," he ordered the waiter.

A morose ancient in a shiny dress suit ambled out with the coffee and bent rheumatically over a nearby table with a tray.

"Down the bottom of the garden," said Pusey sharply. I suspected bullying for bullying's sake. He evidently liked making himself felt. The waiter, angular as a rake, took in his bulk offensively, and shambled off to a table under a birch tree. We followed. Pusey ordered a wicker chair to be brought. After one doubtful look at it he sank, with a creak of protesting withies, into its depth.

"You can go now," he snapped. And when the waiter was gone, feebly flapping his serviette: "How these shanky wisps hate a well rounded man."

He folded one fat leg over the other, seemed to ruminate awhile as to whether he was comfortable.

It was there, sitting hard on a slatted park chair under a birch tree, the wind whispering in its branches and the mellow sun lighting up its changing leaves, that I heard the story of the coming of Minimum Man.

But he began at a tangent.

"You will like the food at my place," he said.

I murmured something unintelligible in response.

"I have a very fine cook," he added meaningly.

"Then there is someone in the secret besides you and the mother?"

"No. Their mother is the cook.

"Oh!" I said, taking this in.

"A curious woman," he went on, lapping his coffee like a sensitive cat. "She is protuberant, like me." He glanced at the protentous swelling at the base of his waistcoat. "Fatter, if anything. We make a fine pair. When I run her down to the town in my car, people look twice, as if they had just glimpsed a remarkable coincidence. We are a sort of mirror to one another. It is comforting."

He lapped at the coffee again.

"We met, let me see, five years ago. I had been at the house about a year, and during that time had sampled a round dozen women to look after me. They came in shoals. I could never swear which of them was there at any particular moment. The place is lonely, and on the whole they were a feckless lot, the drab, inefficient underdogs of their trade. I remember one of them . . . but that will keep. There were times when I despaired, times when I imagined the house would have to be given up. And I didn't want to give it up, once I had set up the laboratory."

I raised an eyebrow at this.

"Driven to it by boredom," he explained. "During the first months, I had nothing to do but potter around the house and walk the hills. For ten years I had looked forward to that as Nirvana, but it palled astoundingly. I felt my brain going mushy and had to do something. I turned to chemistry, in an amateurish and experimental way.

"I always have been interested in science, but somehow, before, I had never got to grips. Just desultory reading, no more. I bought a certain amount of apparatus and converted an old dairy. It made a great difference; it gave my mind something to bite into.

"But I hadn't reckoned with popular prejudice. That laboratory was nearly the death of me. You can't imagine the suspicious sniffing which went on as each of them discovered it. God alone knows what they thought. They seemed to imagine that laboratories are used solely for melting down bodies. That's the cinema, I expect.

"I remember one of them, a sane woman, I suppose, bustling in one day when I was working. I turned, and there she was, her eyes round noughts of consternation. She looked at the bottles, test-tubes, filters, burners and tubing and dropped the bucket, water and all. The last I saw of her she was going down the drive, pulling a shawl over her shoulders and scampering, fair scampering. They don't like magic in Wales."

"Wales, is it?" I murmured.

He nodded, a bit rattled at the indiscretion.

"Then Mrs. Jones turned up, spectacularly. I had been without a woman for two whole days, and was sitting in a chair on the lawn, trying to digest my own abominable cooking. I have only to close my eyes to see her coming up the drive, with a grand, rollicking sea roll to her, first to starboard, then to larboard, you know the kind of thing, the oscillating motion of a balloon before a small wind. She had a great cape over her shoulders and her head was crowned with a saturnalia of

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flowers, and in her hand was something like a laundry wicker basket. I had occasion to remember that basket later. It is five miles from town, and she had obviously walked the whole way. She was panting with exhaustion when she pulled up in front of me and asked if I was looking for a cook.

"'Aside from the drink it's a capital cook I am,' she said, 'though I say it who shouldn't. The drink do not be as bad as all that, sir.'

"I LIKED Mrs. Jones, but it was difficult to believe in the cooking. I asked her a few questions. That is, I asked her one, and she proceeded to tell me the story of her life. She had been born at Mardre, the town she had come from now. But she had always been ambitious, and by twenty she was cook to Lady Martlet, in a big house on the outskirts of Gloucestor. She was with her ten years, and it was there the drink 'took her.' Out of a job and holidaying at New Quay she had met and married a Welsh sea captain, 'all in a cyclone, sir.' She was Welsh herself and 'knew the worst about them men, don't you trouble.'

"The captain had survived a year and then perished at Magallanes, 'or so it was said,' she added suspiciously. She has a notion the captain is only hiding. After that there was a purple patch of living on compensation money, another post as a cook to some rich people at Willesden, and a swift succession of lapses and posts, culminating in a job as charwoman at a poison gas station in the West Country. She had now come home again for various reasons, and was living in a small cottage at Mardre, 'scrubbing a bit and washing a bit, me that is the best cook in Wales!'

"'You will not be frightened in my laboratory?' I asked.

"'Tush, no. Heard I have about you and your old bottles,' she said cheerfully. 'Never was I the woman to be frightened of a bottle. The idea! But let you be warned, sir. You keep the methylated under lock and key. That will be best for everybody.'

"She turned out to be a great treasure, better than anything I had imagined. She cleaned up the place thoroughly, singing with immense gusto those mournful dirges the Welsh have for hymns. And she cooked like an angel. I kept a discreet eye on the wine and the beer, but so far as I could see, there was nothing amiss. She caught me counting the bottles one day. 'Sure it will burst out on me again one of these days,' she remarked, and shook her head sadly in self mockery.

"And true enough, when she had been with me a fortnight she was 'struck,' as she called it. I waited for dinner and listened to the curious noises in the kitchen. The hymns had given way to rough pre-Reformation songs, and several times I caught the clatter of smashing dishes. I vaguely suspected the worst, but for a long time gave her the benefit of the doubt. But at last, when the dinner was over an hour late, I went towards the kitchen and was about to enter when I stopped. She was speaking loudly and rather hoarsely.

"'Now then, child-er-en,' she was saying, 'never you be the shame and disgrace your poor mother is. Never. Keep you off the drink, that is what I say. In every bottle, certain, there do be a little devil with a red tongue, and no use whatever is it to swallow him. Four of them are in my stomach this very minute, moidering my senses. Sign the pledge you all must, for your dear mother's sake.'

"I had waited long enough for dinner, and entered briskly. She turned round with a cry, but I was not looking at her. My eyes were fixed on the first two specimens of Minimum Man I had ever seen.

"They were sitting on the table, a male and a female, in the scanty garments they wear, holding each other's hand. I caught a glimpse of them only, for the next instant, Mrs. Jones' suffused red face intervened. She was pushing me out of the kitchen, bodily hurling me out. At the door I turned and had one last glimpse of the two figures. They were still sitting on the table, still holding hands in a sort of still surprise. Then the door slammed in my face.

"Do you remember what you felt when you first saw Napoleon?" he asked.

I nodded.

He had gone back to the dining-room and waited. He had not, he *could* not believe in what he had seen.

In about half an hour Mrs. Jones came in to lay the table. She was pale, but so far as he could see, sober.

He had to speak to her.

"Mrs. Jones," he said.

"Oh, my!" she gasped softly under her breath.

"I did not know you had children."

She stood in front of him for a moment in distress, then wavered on her feet and sank into a chair, collapsing like a bag of flour. She sat there moaning softly, her eyes wet with tears, wretched beyond

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words. He thought it best not to say anything, and after a while she began to tell him. It was not a very clear statement, but bit by bit he was able to piece it together.

He was certain from what she told him that the poison gas station at which she had charred had supplied the motive force, the all-important accident. This *volte face* in nature had its beginnings there, somehow. A slight inhalation of an unknown gas, itself perhaps not detected as the by-product of some process, had no doubt been responsible for the double phenomena. For I had to remember that there were two. Furthermore, the issue was not normal. Her children, taken together, had probably not weighed more than six ounces, as against the average of six pounds, at birth.

A double miracle. The fat man rummaged in his pocket for pipe and pouch. There was a touch of glee in his blue eyes.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE very idea of formally accepting her strange offsprings, by registering them, by giving them names, appalled Mrs. Jones. To call them John and Mary, that was unthinkable, somehow. And always there was the fear of discovery. She had no explanations to offer at all. There they were, two little things that were in no way the like of any babies ever born.

"Puppies, that was what they were, to her. And the macabre suggestion of drowning them in a bucket was inevitable. It is astonishing, when you come to think of it, that something of the sort did not happen. She had none of that blood of my blood and bone of my bone feeling about them, at first, anyway. No proprietorial pride at all, none of that sense of accomplishment, the alone-I-did-it-feeling of the triumphant mother. But she scotched the desire. If Mrs. Jones were not the woman she is, Minimum Man might have been extinguished almost at birth."

Alexander Pusey looked at me thoughtfully, an expression which changed into malicious mockery.

"How do you feel about it?" he asked.

"Go on," I said.

"She put aside the bucket and temporized. Perhaps she hoped for some phenomenal growth into normal babies. Who knows? Anyway, she fed them, and went about her work. The twins lay in the big bed in the front room, thumbs in mouth, 'the little darlings.' No one need know, with care. But it was essential the neighbours should not see them.

"That exercised her a good deal. How to keep them from the neighbours? But she is not without wit, in her dumb way. To have covered the window without cause would have been suspicious. So she pushed a poker through the one pane and pasted it up with brown paper. That passes anywhere in Wales. Nothing need be done about it for years.

"One evening, she came home and overheard the two of them talking; practicing speech as we know now."

"No," I said, throwing my cigarette on the grass and stamping it out. "No."

"What is the matter?" he asked, staring at me.

"That is too much."

"They were eight weeks old by then."

"It is still too much," I protested.

The waiter came out of the hotel and hovered indeterminedly under the veranda. Alexander called him and paid. The waiter went to get change. We were standing up, facing each other.

"She had, of course, taught them to say Mama," I said.

"They were talking, I tell you."

"At eight weeks!"

"Exactly."

"But . . ."

"There is no but. There you go, the asphalted and rolled mind! You have not yet realized, not begun to realize, what has happened. This is a major miracle. They were talking, at eight weeks.

I shrugged my shoulders and muttered.

"In English, I suppose?"

"In English. What other language would you expect them to use?"

"Sanscrit," I said, and moved away. He followed, took the change from the waiter, and we both got into the car.

We drove on for a few miles in silence. It was then about half past-three.

"You have not *begun* to realize," he said, twisting his head round to catch a glimpse of my face.

"No doubt."

"You spoke with Napoleon, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Napoleon could speak almost as well when he was a month old as he can today. He was fully grown at eighteen weeks."

"All right, I'll take it."

"Damn your preconceptions," he said huffily, and put on speed.

"It was odd, that talk, all the same," he said.

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"What talk?" I asked.

"Don't be dull. The talk that Mrs. Jones heard."

"About relativity, I suppose."

"I don't know what they were talking about. The odd thing is that they should be talking at all."

"That's what I thought."

"Yes, but it was odd for a reason you know nothing about. They don't talk, much, only to me and Mother. They communicate by telepathy."

"Oh!"

"Yes. By telepathy. They don't need to talk. They can pass pure, wordless thought to each other. But all the same, they learn to talk in order to read. It makes things simpler."

I said nothing. There was nothing to be said.

"But they can't telepathise ordinary human beings, you know. I have tried experiments. They can't pass their thoughts to me, or to Mother, without speaking. But they can, under certain circumstances, receive thought from us direct. It is very variable, and perplexing. It probably depends upon the *sympathy* there is between us.

"They always seem to know what their mother is thinking about, if her thoughts concern them. You can now see how those original twins learnt to speak so quickly. Their mother used to chatter to them. Now, when the ordinary mother says to her child: 'Come here and be washed,' the child does not understand. It doesn't understand because it cannot penetrate through the unknown words to the meaning hidden in them. But when, as in this case, the children got both the meaning and the words together, they naturally learnt to speak in a mighty short time."

"DO YOU think Napoleon knew what was in my mind all the time?" I asked.

"No, hardly. It is unlikely. I found myself that I could only communicate direct with their minds when I wanted to badly enough. Educating them was a simple matter. It is true that I kept on talking, but it was not really necessary. I remember one of them was away an hour. I dealt with the theorem of Pythagoras with the girl . . . the woman, then. The man turned up later, and I started explaining. The whole of the theorem was in my mind at the time. The man held up his head and said that it was not necessary to go on. He had *got* it. I had been tapped, you see."

"Good Lord," I said. "One never knows, then?"

"Not quite. But as a general principle, when you want them to know, they will know. When you don't want them to know, they won't."

"You talk about 'they'," I said suddenly. "How many are there, then?"

"At the last census, two hundred and fifty."

"What!"

"Yes, two hundred and fifty. They mature in a couple of weeks. Besides, a single mother sometimes has as many as three children in a year."

It was then, I think, that I first saw dimly the trouble that lay ahead.

"Two hundred and fifty!" I whispered, dumbfounded.

"And there might have been more," he said slowly, "but some of them were born without this telepathic capacity I have been telling you about. Some of them seemed incapable of learning, were morons, in short. Some of them were . . . antisocial, refused to fit in with the rest."

"And what happened to them?" I asked.

"Death," he said. "Sudden death. They were killed."

"But look here. . . ." I began.

"You will see for yourself," he interrupted. And suddenly there he was, withdrawn, apart from me, bunched over the wheel, his eyes on the road, not wanting to be questioned.

I sat in the car, thinking. He was staring right ahead, along the road. We passed through Chester and its turmoil of traffic, and headed westwards into the mountains.

Night was falling. The light withdrew itself. The trees began to collect their canopies of darkness. I slept, leaning against the door.

I woke suddenly. The headlights were cutting great swathes in the darkness ahead. The tall, high hedges with their overhanging trees raced by like a flowing tape. The car seemed to gulp the succession of telegraph poles rhythmically, gulp, pause, gulp, pause, gulp, pause, a mesmeric regularity.

Then there was a breath of sea air, a shimmer of dark waters in the distance as the lights momentarily brushed over them. We passed through an ill-lit, sleepy town with few people in the streets. Beyond again was the darkness and a narrower by-road. We climbed steadily, twisting between the high hedges. Some of the road, I could see, was bare rock.

As we swung sharply round a bend, the

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land dipped, rose again, and flattened out. The hedges disappeared. It was open moorland, and the road was rougher, with wheel tracks scored into its surface. The car jolted over the ruts, and the springs squealed. A circle of trees swung past on the left. We rounded with them, the boles clean and upward leaping in the sharp light. Gravel gritted under the tires, the lights swept the white façade of a house, and the car pulled up gently.

"Here we are," said Pusey.

I got down and waited for him. My legs were stiff, and I stamped to free them. The farther door slammed and he came round the front of the car to join me.

"Come along."

"Wait a minute," I said, and got my bag out of the boot of the car. I followed him to the door. In the room to the right a fire was flickering. There were glowing shadows on the ceiling. The fanlight above the door lit up and the door opened.

"This is Mrs. Jones," said Pusey. "Mrs. Jones, I have brought a friend."

"Oh, my!" she gasped, and stepped back.

She blocked up the passage. It was like being welcomed by all women rolled into one. She was immense.

"Your dinner is ready, sir," she said, and turned like a leviathan.

I followed her. Pusey came behind. He spoke over my head.

"All well, Mrs. Jones?"

"Yes, sir, as good as can be expected."

"Right."

Mrs. Jones turned again in the passage to face me, and pointed to the room where I had seen the firelight.

"The drawing-room," she said.

I entered and Pusey followed, turning up the light.

The parquet floor looked like ripe grain under the light. There were no rugs, everything plain and bare, too plain for a room. No pictures on the walls, and little furniture, two comfortable looking chairs slanting towards the fire, a desk near the window. An air of shiftless austerity which was almost poverty. It did nothing to set one at ease.

Mrs. Jones pulled the curtains, thick red rep, and went out. Pusey caught my eye.

"Spartan, isn't it? Not what you had expected? Oh, well."

WE SAT down and leant towards the fire, chafing our hands.

"When I came here first I thought I'd make it a really comfortable place," said Pusey, with a kind of hostlike embarrassment. "Then somehow it didn't seem worth while. And after They came, well, it seemed to matter less than ever."

"I like it," I said, lying.

He leant back in his chair and folded his hands over his chest. He looked tired.

"What were you doing in London?" I asked.

"I told you. I came to see you."

"No, the first time, in the van."

"Oh, that!" He seemed to ponder a moment. "That was to raise money. There were a dozen of them all told. It was only Napoleon got lost."

"The police discovered where you had stolen your van."

"What! I never thought they would trace anything taken from a dump heap. That shows. One can't be too careful."

"How did you mean to raise the money?"

"Oh, just an idea. A foolish one, probably." He was evasive again.

"The trouble with me is that I am no organizer," he said. "My plans are sound enough, but they go wrong. They always go *wrong*. That is why I want your help. That van, for example. . . . It was idiotic to drive it into that railing. It was idiotic to leave Napoleon there. I knew it then, but I got into a panic, a fat man's panic, you know. I could think of nothing but getting away and back again. I am not proud of that."

"How did you manage it?"

"I hid them in an empty house during the day and then bought the Ford. That evening I fetched them. It was quite easy. They were all there, except Napoleon. I was very worried about him. However, as it happened. . . ."

"How were you going to make money?" I asked again.

"Perhaps," he said deliberately, "perhaps you will forgive me if I do not answer that until it is decided what is to be done with you."

I felt a slight shock of anxiety.

"What do you mean?" I asked lightly.

"My orders were to fetch you here," said Pusey in a low voice. "After dinner Solomon will come in and talk to you."

"Your orders! . . . But you are master here, aren't you?"

"I realized you had made a mistake," he said. "It was easier to leave you in the dark. No, it isn't me."

"Who the devil is it, then?" I asked brusquely.

"Don't shout, man. You might be heard. Solomon. The first man. Oh, yes, he's boss all right." He laughed ruefully. "I am . . .

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well, what am I? A sort of employee, a slave, really. He has the power."

"You might have escaped," I said, "this time when you were up in London."

"But I don't want to escape!" He was genuinely surprised.

"Solomon trusts you?"

"More or less. He knows my mind inside out. I am all for him. There isn't a better fellow in the world. Don't make any mistake about that."

"I see. What was the idea, then, in bringing me here?"

"I don't quite know. He told me to fetch you. Napoleon should have killed you, and he didn't. You were a danger, an unknown factor. He wanted to know how dangerous you were, I think; just how much you had let out. That is only my guess-work, of course."

A horrible thought hovered in my brain.

"I may have been brought here, then, for. . . ."

I did not finish the sentence, but looked at Pusey. He nodded his head gravely.

"Good God, man, do you mean that you would agree if he ordered me to be killed?"

"I would have no option, but he will not do that unless it is absolutely necessary. It depends on you. But if he *did*, I would not raise a finger, not a finger. I am absolutely certain that whatever he does is for the best."

And then the dinner gong went.

We trooped out across the hall and into the dining-room, my back a stiff ramrod of disapprobation. I was not going to be slaughtered like a calf, if I could help it.

I DO not remember much of that dinner, as a dinner. I have a vague impression that it was very good. I ate everything automatically. I remember being surprised at the service. Mrs. Jones would come puffing in, her face inflamed and set in a silly joviality. She would put down the course, and move out of the room at a trot. Later she would be in again, clearing away with an eager celerity. There were five or six such appearances and disappearances.

I do not remember the dinner because I received such a shock right at the beginning. I had unfolded my napkin, and was reaching out towards the bread, when one of the little men climbed on to the far end of the table and walked towards me. On the far side of the cruet he sat down cross-legged, clasping an ankle with each hand. He looked at me steadily for some time.

"Solomon," said Pusey, a little nervously. I thought.

I bowed, mockingly. Solomon kept looking at me with grey, clear eyes.

"Ah," I said, "on trial, I suppose?"

"In a way, yes," said Solomon.

"On trial for my life?"

"That, too," said Solomon.

"This is what comes of trying to help one of you," I said bitterly.

Solomon looked disappointed, and lowered his eyes. He was darker than Napoleon, with heavier eyebrows and a balder, higher forehead, and the scar of an old wound across it. He was stiller, too, with the stillness of deaf men. He wore tight shorts, like a circus performer.

"You look disappointed," I said.

"I had hoped," and he smiled almost ruefully, "to find a human being devoid of this passion for gratitude. Is there none amongst you who does things for the sake of doing them, and not for the rewards they may bring?"

Mrs. Jones came in with the soup and saw him sitting on the table.

"Now, Solomon," she said sharply, "I hope it is not disturbing the gentlemen at dinner you are."

"No, Mother."

She had a disapproving look on her face.

"Let us go on with the trial," I said.

"First," said Solomon, "let me tell you why the order was given that those who saw us plain should be killed. The colony, for the time being, must remain secret. There is much to be done before we can disclose ourselves."

"In what way?" I asked.

"You must take my word for that. We are not yet prepared."

"I see."

"It is not likely that those who see us will keep their tongues quiet, and the only way we can be sure of it is by death."

"Are you certain your secret is worth it?" I asked. "After all, death is a terrible price to pay for an accident. Two men have already paid it."

"Two more or less, does it matter?"

"It is a question of principle, not of mathematics."

"Do you consider death important?"

"Unpleasant," I said. "I do not want to die. I want to hang on to life as long as possible."

"Why?" he asked. There was genuine curiosity in his voice.

"Why not?" I countered.

"Because your life is so very useless," he said quietly. "Napoleon tells me that you are a newspaper reporter. Is it possible that you took your work seriously?"

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"No," I admitted. Then, "No" again.

"Perhaps you had thought of doing other things, things which you considered worth while?"

"I cannot honestly say I did."

"Then why object so strongly to death?" he asked gently. "Death is surely the best way out."

"No," I said, "it is not. You see . . . life isn't just work, or the value of work." I turned to Pusey and asked him: "Is it necessary to explain all this?"

"Afraid so," Pusey said. "They are so confoundedly different. They miss the most ordinary things."

I turned again to Solomon.

"Life is all sorts of other things, to a man. It is, above all, a habit difficult to break off."

"But if it is admittedly an unpleasant habit?" asked Solomon.

"Meaningless would be a better word," I explained. "Yes, and even so, both meaningless and unpleasant, there is always a tie which cannot be broken."

"What exactly is that tie?" he asked patiently.

"Hope, I think. Hope that some day it will have meaning and become pleasant."

"But surely," said Solomon, "a man would know that in most cases the lack of meaning and pleasure comes from within, and that it can never, never be cured. Well, it seems more important than ever, from your point of view, whether you have told anyone about us. Have you?"

"No."

"Do you mean to keep the secret?"

"As long as you wish me to."

"Thank you," said Solomon.

"As a matter of fact . . ." said Pusey.

"Oh, I believe him," said Solomon. "I know that what he said is true."

"But how can you?" I asked. And then I remembered. He could, under some circumstances, read my mind. It gave me a jolt, remembering that. I had wanted him to believe what I said badly. My mind must have been wide open.

"So you know?" asked Solomon, and smiled.

I stirred uneasily. I did not like this business of mind reading. I wished he would go away. I did not care if he could read that in my mind. I wished he would go away.

And almost as I wished it, with a curious understanding look in his eyes, he rose to his feet, slid off the table, and was gone.

I felt like a rude guest, ashamed.

"Reprieved, I think," said Pusey.

"I hope so."

"Curious beggars," he said. "There's Solomon now, the gentlest soul that ever breathed, and yet, if he had found it necessary, he wouldn't have scrupled a second to have your throat cut."

"Self-interest run mad," I commented. "It's the way villains and brutes have always acted the world over. He's in my way, cut his throat."

"Not self-interest with Solomon!" said Pusey, shocked. "Certainly not self-interest. The man is completely selfless, doesn't know what self is. It's the community he's thinking of, the colony first and last and all the time. No, no, say nothing more. You will see the colony for yourself, tomorrow."

"Where do they live?"

"Oh, anywhere in the woods around."

AND, in the morning, I did see them. I stepped out into the bright fresh sunshine and had a look at the house. It was a compromise between the typical farm house of the area and the gentleman's residence. The heavy limestone of its structure had been white-washed, the massive chimneys at each end, like supporting buttresses, were there, but the proportions were vaguely Palladian, with a columned portico in front of the door. A slate let into the front bore the date 1822 in a flowered scrawl.

The house looked towards the woods we had skirted the night before, and faced east. I moved round the house to the back and gazed over the country. To the left was an orchard. In front was the kitchen garden, and beyond its low hedges a short, green valley, four or five fields at the most. This cup of greenness was lipped by the moor, brown and shaggy, with an occasional tree and a few subservient shrubs. The cones of higher hills lifted vaguely on the horizon.

I was looking at all this and lighting a cigarette when there was a sort of whistle in the air, followed by a thud. I wheeled round and saw one of the little fellows sprawling on the grass. He was lying face down, his nose in the mud, his legs splayed out behind him ludicrously. His arms were spread wide, and a sort of canvas structure was tied with string along his spread-eagled arms and down his side, tapering to a point at the hip. I stepped forward and bent over him.

"Hurt?" I asked

He lifted his nose from the mud and wiped it with a hand.

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"Damn!" he spluttered, and rose slowly to his feet.

"You are not hurt?" I asked.

"No, of course not. Nuisance!" he muttered to himself.

"What is a nuisance?" I asked. It was odd addressing this tiny creature from on high.

"It doesn't work," he said. "I can't understand . . . but that does not matter. There must be something wrong with my calculations. There *must* be. In theory, it should work. I should have cleared the garden hedge. Easily. Instead, I just flopped."

"Have you been trying to fly?" I asked.

"From there," and he pointed towards the coping above our heads.

"Like Clem Sohn," I said, "years ago."

"Did you ever see him?" he asked.

"Twice, before he was killed."

"His problem was different," he said. "Once you get height all is well. You can fly, then. I went up two thousand feet, once, hitched to a hydrogen balloon, and let go. It is easy. You get speed, resistance. It's like a high wind, and very easy."

"Let me get this clear," I said. "Do you mean that you've been up two thousand feet and then let go without a parachute?"

"Yes."

"My God."

"It was as easy as walking. I knew it would be. I can fly in a high wind with this contraption—well, not this one, but another like it. I wanted to glide in still air, but you saw what happened. It's the material, partly. And of course my calculations may be wrong. They must be wrong."

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Icarus. Do you happen to know anything about the mechanics of flight?"

"Sorry, not a thing."

"I've got all the text-books," he said. "But all the same, I would like to talk it over with someone. I am the only one interested in aeronautics, so far. They laugh at me, a bit. Lavoisier—he's one of the chemists—got the balloon for me."

"Have any of the others flown?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, most of them, in a gale. Solomon crashed into a beech tree after rising about three hundred feet. That is how he got the scar on his forehead. If you are interested, you must come and see me some time. I work in a room in the attics."

"I would like to," I said.

"I must go back now," and he ran along the grass and round the house.

I realized then that I would never be able to know them apart. Pusey had told me that even Mrs. Jones had given up the attempt.

The moment he was gone another came along from the direction of the garden.

"Did he fall again?" he asked eagerly.

"Quite heavily," I said.

"He will break his neck one of these days unless he's careful. But he's a good man, Icarus. I am going to take lessons from him myself later on."

"I wish I could myself," I said. "By the way, do you know where Napoleon is this morning?"

"I am Napoleon. Don't you know me?"

I looked at him. He was certainly familiar, but then, they all were.

"Where is your razor?" I asked.

"You must have read about that. After I killed the second man, I hid it in a tree, but the police found it."

"Why did you kill him?" I asked grimly. I felt the old surge of loathing mounting in me. "Did he see you?"

"No, of course not. But I had to kill him to save you."

"What! You killed him to save me?"

"I had to," he explained. "Judith had told me about the criminal code before I went. She had explained the uses of the police and of Scotland Yard. I knew—when you escaped me that day—that you would be bound to be suspected and held. You were, were you not? I considered that you would say nothing about me at first. It would sound so odd to those who had never seen any of us. But later you would be sure to tell the truth. Solomon has told us that the very first thing we must realize about humans is their grotesque fear of death, and you hang for killing. So I had to murder another man to get you out of the hands of the police, murder him in such a way that it was absolutely certain the same killer had caused both deaths. There was no mistake in my reasoning." He said this proudly. "You *did* get out of the hands of the police without saying a word about us."

I WAS dumbfounded by his calm analysis. There was not trace of compunction. It might have been a geometric proof.

"I wish you had killed me instead," I said bitterly.

"I tried to, but you were too quick for me. I was astonished by the way you parried me off into the hedge. I had never

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realized before the hatred you humans must have for death."

"You killed him because he saw you. Don't deny it."

"But I have explained it all to you."

"You lie."

"No. Why should I lie?"

"Because you don't want the man's death on your conscience."

He looked extremely puzzled. He *was* extremely puzzled.

"Will you please explain?"

"You want me to take the blame for the man's death."

"You were to blame. If you had only allowed yourself to be killed quietly he would be alive today. If that matters."

"It does matter," I stormed.

"Not to me." And then, quietly, "If it would make you happier to think that I killed him because I saw him, then why don't you think so? I have been told that humans can believe whatever they want to."

"Can't you?" I asked.

"No," he said. "We can only believe what we think is the truth. If I try to believe a lie it makes me ill. I tried it once."

"You were a dirty little beast to kill him," I said angrily.

He shook his head almost sadly.

"I do not understand you. I killed a man and saved you from death, probably. You hate death. You should be glad, but you are not. You are angry. No, I do no understand. I must ask Solomon about it."

He walked away slowly, and then turned round.

"You are sure you are angry?" he asked.

"Yes," I shouted.

He walked away, thinking it out. I did not dare ask myself the question he had asked me. I was afraid of the answer.

I walked slowly past the house towards the copse and sat down on the bole of a fallen tree at the edge of the wood. I had seen two of them, but where were the others? There was no sign of them anywhere. I called softly:

"Hello."

No one answered, and I waited. From the wood, one of them came running out. She was a woman, whiter, more agile, less heavily muscled in proportion than the men. I looked at her and signed to the tree. She shinned up the bole and sat down next to me.

"I heard you calling," she said. Her voice, too, was different, more musical.

"I wondered where you all were."

"Some are in the valley, and some are in the wood," she said.

"Will you please let me know your name?"

"Mary."

It was odd, the way I felt. I had that sense of her femininity quite strongly in me. I found myself treating her differently, more courteously, more cautiously, perhaps. I instinctively felt protective, patronizing, falsely deferential, all the things one does feel when there is an attractive woman around. I straightened my tie and would have opened doors for her, had there been any to open. She was lovely, in her small way, like a Tanagra figure, dressed in a light silk slip of snowy whiteness.

"I read a book about humans, and why they act as they do," she told me. "I'd like to ask if it is true. There was a great deal about making marriage beautiful. Is human marriage usually ugly?"

"No," I said, "not very. But you do not understand. Don't you fall in love?"

"I can't quite make out what falling in love is," she said, "but I doubt if we do. It means, doesn't it, that a woman chooses somebody and feels queer about him?"

"Yes, something like that."

"And is it very beautiful?"

"Yes, it is."

"As beautiful as going to church?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "I made a list of the things humans find beautiful. One of them was falling in love, and another going to church. Then there was poetry and music and painting, and something called operating on the Stock Exchange."

"Where did you find that?" I laughed.

"Oh, all the books talk about making money as beautiful. But I may be wrong. Am I?"

"No, just a bit mixed."

"You must not laugh," she chided. "It means that you are mocking me. Tell me about the State of Love."

"To fall in love," I began, and stopped a moment to think it out. Then I tried again. "To fall in love means choosing one person out of all other persons. . . ."

"How do you do that?" she interrupted. "Why do you single her out? I mean, what test do you use?"

"It is an instinct. It is not done by thought."

"You do not use your brains at all?"

"No, hardly at all."

"You don't think about it?"

"We think about little else when young. But we never know why we fall in love

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with one person and not with another."

"It must be terrible for you to lose control like that," she said.

"No, it is delightful, the best thing that can happen in life."

"But so unreasonable!"

"Absolutely. They want to be together, to see each other constantly, to hold each other's hands, and kiss each other's lips."

"A sticky business, like eating marmalade," she said, thoughtfully.

"Well . . ."

"WHAT exactly happens in the Human woman's mind about the man?" she asked. "I am interested in that."

"There is a sort of warm, excited feeling in her heart about him which she does not feel for any other man," I explained. "When he comes home in the evening her pulse rate is raised several beats. She thinks he is the best man in the world, often the most beautiful man in the world, always the most clever man in the world. And when he is in love, the man thinks the same thing about the woman."

"But, of course, none of it is true."

"No, I suppose not."

"But truth is so important," she said. "Do they ever know the truth?"

"Some of them do. They know the truth when love dies, or ceases to be blind love, at any rate. Then one day the woman, instead of seeing a Hero come to the gate, sees an ordinary little man with a bowler hat and a rolled umbrella."

"That must be lovely, to come back to the truth." She clasped her hands.

"Far from it," I said. "They hate it. They force themselves to live as long as they possibly can in a State of Lies. When a woman see her man as he is, she has only one desire. Either to see him again in the old false way, or to see some other man as a tissue of fictions."

"Humans," she said judiciously, "must be extraordinary."

"They are," I admitted."

"Do they, when they are in love, still admit that two and two make four? Does this madness spread over everything?"

"Nearly everything, but not over the multiplication table."

"A partial madness only?"

"That is so. The truth about it is that nature postulated in human beings a profound distaste for marriage. Nature seems to have said at the beginning: these humans will not find family life so well worth living that they will wish to perpetuate it, so they must be trapped by subtle devices into family groups. The ordinary reasoning processes must be atrophied, their brains must be twisted and pulped and mushed into submission to my purposes. The result is that the whole process of marriage is divorced of all reason and is, to a man looking at it objectively, a distasteful fraud of the most blatant kind. I say, I have been talking a lot."

"You have made it much clearer," she said, and smiled.

"You are very beautiful," I said.

"Yes, I am," she agreed. "Our beauty makers are always modeling me in plasticine. I go and look at the figures they make, and quite often I feel profoundly moved."

She stretched out a leg, and for a time we both looked at it, critically.

"Our marriage plans are all under the control of the Eugenic Committee," she said, "and we do not make any permanent family groups."

"The what Committee?" I asked, dumbfounded.

"The Eugenic Committee. E—u—g—e—" she started to spell.

"Yes, I know the word."

"Before we have our mates chosen, we appear before the committee. Our individual physical variations are measured and noted, but that is considered less important than our mental make up and capacities. We are given tests. Our heredity is charted. The committee sits for two weeks, considering each case on its merits. Then it issues a Mating List. We know from that who has been selected for us to marry."

"But suppose you refuse to obey?" I asked. "Suppose there arose in you a personal preference, the kind of thing which happens to humans?"

"It did happen, once," she agreed reluctantly. "In the case of Cosmo."

"Will you tell me about it?"

She stopped swinging her legs and sat still.

"It was one of the makers of beauty," she said, "artists as you call them. The Eugenic Committee was experimenting on the effects of mating art ability with mathematical talent." She broke off. "By the way, that should interest you. In your biology books it's taken for granted that mental characteristics are not hereditary. But already two of our men working on this problem, Darwin and Huxley, have obtained definite evidence that it is.

"But I was telling you about Cosmo,

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wasn't I? The Eugenic Committee listed him with Lucilla who is a remarkably able mathematician, daughter of a music maker and a warrior, Lucilla, unfortunately, was badly burnt about the face and chest when she was tiny. Cosmo, of course, paid no more attention to this than did any of us.

"But I had been his model, and he suddenly declared that he wished to be listed with me. Napoleon—you know Napoleon? —had been chosen by the Committee for my husband. We were all in a difficulty. I personally did not mind who was allotted to me, and Napoleon, I am sure, would have been equally contented with Lucilla. But Cosmo swore that he would disobey the Committee, and started to dance the Dance of Rage. Napoleon, who is rather hasty, began to dance, too. Lucilla and I looked on for a moment, greatly alarmed. This had never happened before. I sent Lucilla off to get Solomon, and he came hurrying up.

"THE first thing that Solomon did was to order Cosmo to release his mind. I mean by that he was to communicate himself at once. Cosmo did not dare disobey. He poured out his mind in a most disturbing way. I could understand hardly anything.

"Solomon was seriously alarmed now. I could see that. He listened attentively for a while, and then ordered us to move away. I think Cosmo knew what was going to happen. I suspected it myself, and hurried away to safety. We can only send ourselves over the air a distance of thirty yards. When we were out of reach Solomon turned to Cosmo and began concentrating on him.

"This was the first time that I had seen the death penalty enacted. I watched with growing interest. Solomon was overwhelming Cosmo's mind, pouring himself into him like a jet. Cosmo lowered his head, his limbs began to shake, he pressed his hand to his forehead and then suddenly sat down.

"A little later he just crumpled up into a heap, utterly discouraged. I walked away with Napoleon."

"Do you know what happened then?" I asked.

"Lucilla appeared before the Committee and was listed with someone else."

"I meant, to Cosmo?"

"He died, of course. They always die after Solomon has overwhelmed them. They do not want to live afterwards."

"Were you sorry for him?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, no. Why should I be? He disobeyed the Committee."

"Why did he do that? Did you ever find out?"

" No, but Solomon told us that it was as near a case of Human Love as he had come across. And, of course, that has to be stamped out at once. The colony would go to pieces if it were introduced, as it might be, by mismating."

"Don't you remember anything that Cosmo told Solomon whilst they were talking?"

"I do remember one curious thing. He said he was willing to die for me. Solomon was particularly alarmed by that. Atavism he called it, a throwback to Humanity. He is always on the lookout for that. He wants to keep us pure."

"What did Lucilla think of it all?" I asked her.

"What could she think of it except that the colony had had a lucky escape? It was most fortunate that Cosmo did not fall in love, as you call it, with Lucilla. We might not have known about the danger for a generation or two. The colony might have got riddled with love."

I looked at her. She was in dead earnest, with a disapproving little wrinkle round her nose.

"Love," she said finally, with an aphoristic primness, "is a State of Confusion."

Love is a state of confusion. I sat on the bole, looking towards the moor bathed in still sunshine and pondered. Love is a state of confusion. And Minimum Man had cast out love. It was born without love. Until that moment I had not known what to make of them. I had been seeking for some central criterion to judge them by—superman of inframen? And now, it had been given me. I realized, confusedly and gropingly, the possibilities inherent in them, reached forward to the superstructure they were to build on this firm foundation of Lovelessness.

When I came to consider it, it was on the rock of love that the human effort had always been shipwrecked. The hidden, secret, uncharted and unacknowledged rock.

With us, love was a major preoccupation. It hid the sun, splintered the personality, deviated effort. Men had ignored and suppressed and battled with it, and it steamed up again in their brains, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong. Don Juan had accepted it, gloried in it, and it led to futility. Men had sublimated it,

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wrought music and poetry and statuary out of it, poised in a brief stability.

This transmutation, the best that could be done with it, was a mere happy individual accident, no general panacea. Religions had clashed ferociously with it; and in vain. Civil authority had pruned and issued its edicts, pestered and regulated, and all to no avail. There was no getting away from it, no evading it. There it was, of the very stuff and texture of human flesh, ineradicable and disastrous, the cancer which afflicted and conditioned every human activity.

Vaguely, we had realized the defeat inherent in our structure. In whatever direction we moved, this heavy drag brought us to a halt and swung us back to itself. Like an anchored hull veering and running in diverse currents and winds. We knew profoundly that there was no hope for us.

Nature had rid itself of this humiliating incubus. The Dragon was dead. Without this familiar self where was the horizon of Minimum Man? It had shifted incalculably into the distance.

There was an immense exhilaration in that. These people were bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. It was still humanity, through them, that was on the march. We, the old timers, were demoded, dated, done for. But we could at least pass off the stage with a gesture of proud self-dismissal, accepting and indeed revelling in our immolation. The king was dead. Long live the king.

But in that moment of exaltation I thought of Tom, Dick and Harry: Tom, Dick and Harry were strutting their little hour, and felt that they were doing it uncommonly well. They were rehearsed and word perfect in their small parts and would resent being told that at the last moment the Author had cut them clean out of the comedy.

There would be the devil of a shindy.

"Do you think so?" asked a small voice at my side.

I started, and realized that I had been . . . tapped like a sapodilla tree, as Pusey had put it.

"I have not understood everything," Mary went on, "but what I did understand is most important. You are the first human we have come across in the raw state. You are typical, I suppose, and if that is what you think about our reception, I must speak to Solomon about it.

She slipped down from the bole and was gone.

CHAPTER V

I MOVED slowly on into the wood, walking over the mosaic of spot lights filtered through the leaves. There was little undergrowth. I hardly know one tree from the other, but there were a number of oaks, stunted and twisted in this poor soil and at this altitude. Once I noticed a flame of berries in a bush.

I fell upon a path which turned amongst the boles pleasantly and followed it. The path took me to a small open space of flattened yellow grass, and there, sitting on his heels, was Solomon, with a ring of ten youngsters around him.

Solomon's eyes were closed, and there was a still look of rapt concentration on his tiny face. All the others had their eyes shut, too. They might have been asleep.

I took a step forward, and Solomon opened his eyes. The youngsters' heads jerked upwards as one, and they, too, opened their eyes. They all looked at me.

"You must wonder what we are doing here," said Solomon, with that directness and simplicity I had noted in them. "This is the school. I am teaching them."

"How old are they?" I asked.

"Six weeks or thereabouts."

"How do you teach them?"

"I teach by telepathy, as you call it. The children open their minds to me, and I pass on information to them."

"Do you use words?" I asked.

"A mixture of words and direct knowledge. It is like this. Suppose I am teaching them Euclid. I picture to myself the problem, and then go through the proof. Anything that I know immediately becomes theirs. I use a certain force in my mind—it can be controlled. The force is just sufficient to make a memory track that cannot be rubbed out.

"We have had cases where children have failed to pass that test. Children have been born to us who failed to grasp instantly that if one and one make two, then two and two must make four."

"And what happens to them?" I asked.

"I kill them," said Solomon. "We cannot allow a variant like that amongst us. It is too dangerous."

I remembered Cosmo.

"When we have received a general education as extensive as that attained by your university men, we begin to specialize," he explained. "Icarus, for example, has specialized in the problems of aeronautics. We do not attempt to learn from

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him all that he knows, but he does let us know the general principles on which he works."

"In your groups, I suppose, once the facts are established there can be no quarrelling about the interpretation?"

"There is none, usually. The only rows are in the Philosophy group. They will agree on almost nothing, and I have been wondering whether it should not be abolished."

"There, at any rate," I grinned, "you have one point of similarity with Humans. But it is very harmless. We pay no attention to their quarrels."

"There must be a lot of loose thinking here, all the same," he said. "I must look into it."

"About those laboratories . . ." I began. He saw at once that I was uneasy.

"What is it?"

"Mary wants to speak to you about the way you are likely to be received by the Humans."

"Something you told her?"

"Something I thought and she . . . overheard. I can't get used to this keyhole telepathy, you know."

"If you like," said Solomon. "I shall issue an order to stop anyone from overthinking your private thoughts."

"No, please. I don't mind."

"Would you like to tell me yourself?" he asked.

"No, I'll leave it to Mary."

"Very well," said Solomon.

I HAD lunch with Pusey. He was looking the worse for wear. Some of the bumptiousness had been drained from him.

"Slave," he muttered. "The slave mentality, I am developing it. I feel. . . ." He broke a roll of bread savagely.

"What is the matter, exactly?"

"That fellow Lavoisier, the little beast. . . . But you haven't been to see the laboratory yet? The chemistry lab? No, I thought not. There he sits, this Lavoisier, on a cushion if you don't mind, like a damned rajah, and orders me about. Orders *me* about! I don't like it. We humans have our dignity after all. I don't like it."

I asked him to be more explicit.

"The point is that I no longer know what I am doing. I could keep pace with them in the earlier stages, but now, no. They're advanced, you know, damned advanced, and I'm fogged. I just don't know the meaning of those experiments. He orders me to do this and that and the other, and I don't know what it's all about. I ask Lavoisier or Priestley—that's his assistant—what it means. Lavoisier explains patiently, sees that I don't understand, and laughs. That sort of thing gets under the skin. I am just a bottle mover for them. They say: do this or that, and I have to. That's all there is to it."

"What are they up to, exactly?"

"Inorganic poisons," he said. "They used to pore over books, and repeat experiments they found there. But they're beyond that now. I haven't ordered a book for them this last month."

"Do you mean that they have already worked beyond book knowledge?" I asked.

"A long way, I should think. Only I just don't know. There was a scene this morning. I clumsily dropped a tube, and there was a row. Little Lavoisier looked daggers, and Priestley said things . . . which I cannot repeat. A day's work gone west, they said. As if a day mattered!"

I tried to drag him away from his punctured vanity.

"About those poisons," I asked, "what are they for?"

"I don't know. I asked them that, and they said it was knowledge, like any other. But I don't believe them. They're up to something. They're always talking with Napoleon, and I don't like it."

"Why, what has Napoleon to do with all this?"

"He's the head of the fighting force, that's what he is. General Napoleon, high panjandrum of the army."

"This is the first I've heard of an army."

"You've heard nothing yet. What have you been doing with yourself this morning?"

I told him about my talks with Napoleon, Mary and Solomon.

"That's all very well," he fumed. "Solomon seems all right. You'd swear that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but he's a politician. Did you ask him what happened to those who showed no particular aptitude; who don't want to do any specializing?"

"Are there any?" I asked.

"Oh, plenty."

"Well, what does happen to them?"

"They're drafted into the army. *They* go all out for physical fitness. It isn't because they are not intelligent. They are, but they can't go any further. You must rise at dawn some morning. You'll find them out on the lawn there, doing their beastly Dance of Rage, hopping about, you know, with the speed of light. It's astonishing to

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watch. Napoleon, by the way, has been pestering me to order razors since he came back from that trip. He wants two hundred razors. Two hundred!"

"For the army, I suppose?"

"Not a doubt of it. Pity he ever discovered that cut-throat of yours. I use a safety. The army is not armed. It hasn't a weapon, and Napoleon is bothered. He's seen Humans now, and is disturbed. The last day or two, he has stopped asking for razors and spends his time at the laboratory. Something is in the wind, and I don't know what."

"All this must cost a good deal," I said.

"It does," he admitted. "I'm cleaned out. It's been going on for five years now, and what with food, books, equipment and what not all the money's gone. I talked about it with Solomon, and he saw my point. I won't be able to subsidise them any longer. I could see this happening a long time ago and had a flutter on the Stock Exchange. That did no good."

I had forgotten the problem of food, and asked Pusey about it.

"Oh, that does not amount to much, in money. They have small appetites. Solomon says their bodies are built more economically than ours. They eat no meat. During the summer and autumn months they almost manage to live on the country, fruit, blackberries, whinberries, that sort of thing. I've had a field down to potatoes each year, and had them clamped for the winter. They live on those, mostly, and boiled maize and milk. Winter kale, too, and cabbages in the spring. There's hardly any illness amongst them. No, the money's gone on books and instruments of all sorts. They can be damned expensive. And Solomon forced me to hire a number of films, too. He said they wanted to see how the world goes. That cost a pretty penny. They must recoup me somehow."

"I don't see how that can be done."

Pusey wiped his mouth with the napkin and threw it down.

"Easy," he said.

I said nothing, but lifted my brows.

"I have ideas on that head. . . ." He hesitated, looked at me, and decided to go on. "That expedition to town was my idea, and there's no reason why it should not succeed next time. I made a mess of it, and I don't think Solomon would let me go again, but you . . . that would be different."

I began to see light.

"Was that an attempt to get money?" I asked.

"It was. Think of it! Here they are, bold as brass, little creatures no one knows about, intelligent as dons; one could do anything, *anything* with them. They could hide in buildings, open safes, ransack for jewelry, and the police would never know how it had been done. They couldn't possibly know. If it hadn't been for that crash at the waterworks I would have come back with a pile. And we need it, I can tell you."

"Good Lord!" I said.

"Solomon will not let me go again. I haven't asked him, but I know. You see . . . Lord, man, think of it! We might be millionaires."

"How long have you had this idea?" I asked. My suspicions were aroused. I had seen Pusey was a man with a mission, but this did not tally.

"From the beginning." He spoke with a frank, gushing friendliness. "Well, not quite, but almost from the first. I thought they were little animals then, more or less. It's never been out of my mind for long. Oh, yes," he burst out on seeing my expression, "I know what you think, moral ruffianism and all the rest of it. That's how it struck me at first. I fought against it, but it was always there.

"I got interested in them, could see as well as you what it might mean to the world if they got going. And I don't particularly like my fellow men. I wouldn't give that," he snapped his fingers, "to see the lot of them wiped out. And that was all right for a time. I suppose I was nursing a private revenge on them. They haven't paid much attention to me, you know."

"As much your fault as theirs, perhaps," I said, coolly.

"Perhaps," he agreed, but with no conviction. "Then the money began to run out and I got alarmed. After all, there is an even sweeter revenge than letting these fellows out on them. It's letting *me* out on them, and on my own conditions. Money, money, money. I could make some people I know feel pretty small. I would enjoy that, cutting figures in the temples of the mighty with their own cash. It would be sweet."

DINNER that evening was eaten in silence. Mrs. Jones came running in and out in a perpetual frill of anxiety. She looked at us, and in her quick way gathered the tone of our stillness. Thereafter she went on tiptoe, a caricature of our ridiculous selves. I was both amused and embarrassed.

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"After dinner," said Pusey, stiffly, towards the end of the meal, "there is to be a conference in the drawing-room."

"Am I to attend?" I asked.

"Yes, Solomon asked me to tell you. It's up to us humans to stand by one another and . . . and all the rest of us. They don't really care a damn for us. We've got to make a stand and let them see that we mean something, too. They are not cocks of the walk, yet.

"What is the conference about?"

"Napoleon told me it was to discuss what was to be done with humanity."

"Is anything to be done with it?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"I should have thought that the problem was what humanity is going to do with them."

"Exactly. And that's what we've got to impress on them. Humans—it's odd to talk of ourselves as humans—don't know they exist yet, but when they do, look for squalls. So far as I can make out the general idea is to wipe us out and take our place. What's the population of the world? Sixteen hundred millions or so. And there are two hundred and fifty of them. Pretty conceited, don't you think?"

"Very," I admitted.

"How do you feel about that fortune now?" he shot out suddenly.

"It's all the same to me."

He shook my hand warmly.

"I knew you would come around. That's fine. We can do things now. But first, we've got to regain our superiority. No more kowtowing to them. They've got to take our orders, got to. Unless we are careful, we'll have them all wiped out before we've done anything with them."

"There is no danger of that, surely."

"We've got to get going before Solomon decides to disclose himself. Afterwards, it will be no good. Well, let's get along. Show a stiff upper lip, remember."

But when it came to the point, keeping a stiff upper lip was not so easy. Mrs. Jones had lit a fire in the drawing-room. Before it were set two armchairs, radiating with mathematical precision from the hearth. Between them was a small, low round table; an ash tray had been set in the center of this. It all looked very formal and clipped.

We walked across the bare parquet towards the fire. I was beginning to mumble something when Pusey said, "Shh." I was bewildered by it, for there was no one in the room.

"Why . . ." I began.

"Can't you see?" Pusey whispered irritably.

I did see. They were sitting on the mantelpiece in a row, like so many ornaments, scantily clothed. They looked like porcelain figures, but the eyes were alive, following us as we made our way to the chairs.

Did Solomon know as much, or as little, about the psychology of humans? Here were all the stale dodges of the power hound determined to obtain a physical advantage over his vis-à-vis. At one stroke he had cut out the advantage of height. What did it matter if he was only a foot tall? He sat on the mantelpiece, looking down at us. We were sunk without trace, in the depths of our chairs, peering up at him. It might be accident or it might be cunning.

Looking at Solomon, with that scar over his left eye, I thought it was cunning.

No one said a word, not aloud, that is. I knew they might be speaking ten to the dozen. Pusey cleared his throat like one of the "Unaccustomed-as-I-am-to-public-speaking school." But he did not say anything, either. I wondered if I dared light a cigarette in this church atmosphere, so reminiscent of a quiet time among the groupers. I decided I would, and put my hand in my pocket, but at the last moment I kept it there.

Then suddenly Pusey turned to me and started speaking in a high-voiced, offhand, objectionable way. He was making himself felt, to himself at any rate.

"I better let you know who they are," he said, with a nod towards the row. It was like someone running over a group of exhibits at Madame Tussaud's. "That's Solomon in the middle. You know him. On his right is Lavoisier, the chemist I told you about. And that's Priestley with him, the whole lab, in fact. On Solomon's left is Napoleon, and next to him again is Lucilla, the one that got burnt."

I writhed at this. Pusey was being rude, and there was no need of it. I wanted to tone him down, and didn't know quite how to do it. So I just looked up with a bright smile and then slowly faded it out.

"Thank you for coming to the conference," said Solomon. "I hope it was not inconvenient."

He was addressing me and spiking Pusey's guns at the same time. I could see out of the corner of my eye that it flustered him.

I took my packet of cigarettes out after

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all, and lit one. Pusey, without a word, produced his pipe and he, too, lit up.

"WELL, what are you going to do with Humanity?" asked Pusey suddenly, in his most offensive and abrupt way. Napoleon looked annoyed. He did not like being mocked like this. But Solomon paid no attention that I could see.

"This morning," said Solomon, rubbing his hairy chest gently with his left hand, "Mary overthought you, Mr. Swan, and was alarmed by what she learnt. She came and told me. Do you still hold to the ideas you had then?"

"What were those ideas?" asked Pusey. "I had better hear."

He was trying to upset Solomon, I could see, stealing his thunder. He didn't want Solomon to get away with this conference.

"I was wondering what would happen when they went out into the world," I said, speaking directly to Pusey. "They have advantages over us. There's their emotional detachment—no interest in love, for instance—this way of communicating with each other by telepathy. They could do . . . fine things."

"Oh, no one denies that," said Pusey offhandedly.

"Human beings might accept their co-operation, but only on certain conditions," I went on.

"Cooperation, that's the right word," said Pusey, with a glance at Solomon.

"What are those conditions, in your opinion?" asked Solomon.

"That you shouldn't multiply too quickly, for one thing. That's certainly one of the conditions they would make. They will probably want to limit you to a certain fixed number. After all, they don't want to be ousted."

"Certainly not," said Pusey.

I waited, then, but Solomon said nothing. He kept rubbing his chest.

"They will also want you to obey the law of the land. Those murders of Napoleon's, for instance. . . ."

"There was a special concession there for a certain specific occasion," said Solomon.

"You see," I went on, fishing in my mind for objections, "you live in a sort of communist society. You hold all property in common. They won't like that. You hold all thought in common. They won't like that either. They believe tremendously in free thought and free speech. They don't mind how wrong it is so long as it is free. But they won't be able to do anything about that, because they won't know what you're thinking about and talking about. I wouldn't be surprised, all the same, if they insisted that you should talk to each other aloud, as we do."

There was a look of blank incredulity on Napoleon's face. The others, apart from Solomon, seemed amused.

"They won't let you alone," I went on. "They certainly won't let you kill any members of your community that you don't want. Look what happened in India. We stopped Suttee. They will feel like that about you, that you are a sort of inferior people with scoundrelly habits. I was shocked myself when I heard about Cosmo."

Solomon turned his head towards Napoleon. I imagined they were having a rapid interchange of thought. Solomon seemed to remember something, and nodded his head.

I glanced at Pusey. He was looking scared, I thought.

"From their point of view," I went on, "there are so many objectionable facets to your society. There is no family life, for instance. There's this control of the Eugenic Committee . . . over the . . . the marriages. They will think that if the young ones were left to themselves, they would go in for courtship and love as they do themselves."

"God forbid," said Solomon; "we can tell them that it is not true!"

"It will be no use. If you ask me, they will insist on absolute freedom of choice, banns, marriage in church, registration, and responsibility for the young. I don't believe they will be satisfied with anything else."

It was at this point that Lavoisier laughed, a merry laugh, as clear as a bell.

"Please go on," said Solomon.

"Have you a religion?" I asked.

"None that a Human is likely to understand," he said gravely.

"I am afraid you will have to be missionized, just like the poor Chinese and the Moslems and the Buddhists," I said. "Would you have any grave difficulty about joining a church?"

"Yes," said Solomon with the first faint trace of a smile on his lips. "There are insuperable difficulties."

"Pity," I said. "If you could have accepted christenings, confirmation, and all the rest of it, you would get support, and very powerful support, too."

"I have never been able to make out their religion," said Pusey.

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I had finished. The figures on the mantelpiece talked among themselves, silently, of course. This exasperated Pusey. He obviously thought it confoundedly rude.

"I don't see how you can fit," I said. "Your interests and our interests will clash everywhere. There is no point of contact. You don't want money. You don't want power. Respectability means nothing to you.

"Those are the mainsprings of our action. And if you go on multiplying in the way you have, there will be a scramble for food. Either you or they will have to go. And of course, they will not be afraid of you Man to man," I smiled to soften the blow, "there is no hope for you."

I caught Napoleon's eye, and almost blushed.

"Now then," said Pusey truculently, "what are you after?"

SOLOMON'S hand ceased rubbing his chest. He looked down at us.

"We are fresh to the world, yet," he said softly. "No doubt time will reveal to us more clearly both our purposes and our capacity to attain them. At the moment I can only say that our purpose seems to be to carry further and more quickly the best that has been attempted by Man. We seem, on the whole, to have a more single-minded devotion to the things which some men have considered the most important. Truth, Beauty and Goodness. We are probably better equipped than Man to further his own destiny."

"I see," I said fatuously.

"I don't," said Pusey, knocking out his pipe against the fire bars. "What exactly do you mean by that, Solomon?"

"Simply, the pursuit of truth and understanding in all fields."

"And, suppose," said Pusey, "that we interfere with you?"

"So much the worse for you." Solomon smiled.

"You mean?"

"I mean that if Humanity refuses to allow us to be true to our nature, then Humanity will have to go."

"Easily said, but not so easily done," said Pusey curtly.

"It has always happened in nature," said Solomon. "One form of life after another has succumbed to a more complicated, a better adapted one. It will happen again. We are in the hands of eternal purposes."

"That was all very well in an unsettled world," Pusey said. "But now, no. Nature herself is clamped down in favor of those who are already there. She's shut up shop and is out of business. You can't burst in on the racket as easy as all that. There has been no change for, say, twenty million years. Man is on the scene, and will stay there. He's not going to be thrust out. He'll fight."

"And that," said Solomon calmly, "brings us to what we really want to talk about."

"We'll fight if you try to dispossess us," said Pusey.

"And we shall have to dispossess you if you are unreasonable," said Solomon.

"We shall be that," I promised.

"And so," said Napoleon, "it comes to war."

No one said anything for a short time.

"Napoleon has always been for war," said Solomon. "But I did not take that too seriously. To defend the community is his business. That, Mr. Pusey, is why we wanted you to buy two hundred razors. He tells me that the razor is an excellent weapon."

Pusey turned to me and grinned, a very superior grin.

"Is that how you are going to conquer the world, Solomon?" he asked.

Solomon did not reply directly.

"The problem of arms is most important," he said. "If nothing had been available but the razor, the razor would have to serve."

"Listen," said Pusey. "I don't want you people to live in a fool's paradise. It is a great mistake to underestimate your enemy. We have machine guns, rifles, revolvers, howitzers, high explosives of all descriptions, and poison gas. What do you say to a razor against poison gas?"

"Damn it, Pusey," I objected, "they'd hardly use poison gas against them."

"Wouldn't they just!"

"Perhaps," I admitted ruefully, remembering the Abyssinians.

"The razor does seem rudimentary," said Solomon. "That is why I have urged the men to carry out research in other directions. I think we can dispense with the razor now."

"Oh, you can, can you?" said Pusey. "What is it this time, needles?"

"In a way, it is," said Solomon.

"What do you mean, in a way?"

"Lavoisier has managed to concoct a vegetable poison which will kill in a few seconds. We haven't tried it on a man yet, but there's no reason why it should fail."

Pusey laughed again, but not so easily.

"That's all very well. I have no doubt your poison will work, if you can inject it.

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But human beings won't stand still behind bars whilst you poke them with needles. Just exactly in what way are you going to get at 'em?"

"How about blow pipes?" asked Napoleon.

"You mean like the South American Indios?" sneered Pusey.

"How do they work?" I asked.

"They tip a dart with curare poison and then blow it through a sort of pipe," said Napoleon. "You can read about it in the library."

"So that's where you got it," muttered Pusey.

He considered for a bit and then spoke again.

"You've got to make the tubes, and you've got to make the darts. And you can't. Besides, those tubes the Indios use are as long as you are. You wouldn't be able to hide them. No, it won't do. And then, how about practice? The natives begin when they are kids."

"And so shall we," said Napoleon.

PUSEY got exasperated.

"Look here, it won't do, I tell you. There's got to be a lot of wind to propel one of those darts. Our lungs are large. We can just manage it with a terrific blow. But your lungs are too small, only a sixth of ours. The darts would carry no distance. They would flop."

Pusey did not want them to be armed at all. I could see that.

"It's a question of mathematics," said Napoleon.

Again there was a slight pause. No doubt Napoleon was handing over. To Lucilla this time.

It was she who spoke. I noticed again that the voices of their women were softer, more tender. It was an ugly burn on her face and chest.

"I have worked it out," she said. "If we use metal for the tube and a light alloy for the dart it should be possible to send one with fair accuracy for a hundred feet."

"A metal tube would be heavy," said Pusey, "and quite as long in any case."

"We shall use collapsible ones."

"All right," sneered Pusey, "go and make one."

"That is where you could help," said Solomon.

"Who? Me? But I know nothing about metals."

"I have the specifications," said Lucilla.

"All that remains is to get them made," said Napoleon. "We could make a beginning with about three hundred tubes."

Pusey said nothing. He was withdrawn into himself, as if he had washed his hands of the business. His hands were deep in his trousers' pockets. I had never seen him so mulish.

"What do you say, Mr. Pusey?"

"Go on. Make 'em," he scoffed.

"We cannot," said Solomon patiently. "What I propose is that you should take Lucilla's specifications to Birmingham and get them made there."

"And what am I to say they are for?" asked Pusey. "They'll like the look of them, won't they?"

"Say anything you like." It was Napoleon this time, and his temper was short. "Say you want to shoot rabbits with them, or want them as a toy, or that you are starting a trade with South America."

"And the money?"

"How much is there left, Mr. Pusey?"

Pusey pulled out the lining of his trousers' pockets dramatically. A penny rolled on the floor.

"That much," he said.

"You had better pick it up then," said Napoleon wickedly. Pusey glared at him.

"How much have you got, Mr. Swan?" asked Solomon.

"About fifteen pounds, in cash," I answered.

"That will be plenty for his train fare to Birmingham and back," said Napoleon. "The manufacturer will not want to be paid at once."

"And after?" Pusey was almost shouting. "What happens when he does want to be paid?"

"We must get money," said Solomon.

Pusey sat up in his chair. It was coming.

"How?" asked Pusey.

"If Mr. Swan will be good enough to lead another expedition . . ." began Solomon.

Pusey looked at me. There was triumph in his eye. Here's your fortune, he seemed to say. But I was not so keen on it. I wanted to think it out. If I were caught it would be bad. I didn't want to rot in prison.

"I'll think about it," I parried.

"There's not much time for thought," said Pusey. He was all the other way now. "They may be discovered any time. We've got to get money quick to pay for those tubes."

"That's all very well," I objected, "but what about me? If I am caught it will be five years' hard."

"You needn't be caught," said Pusey eagerly. "All you have to do is get them

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to the place you want them, and then wait about until they put the stuff in your hands. It's not dangerous."

"But jewelry is no use to you, is it? You want cash. You've got to sell that stuff. Had you thought of that?"

"I had," said Pusey vaguely, "but there are plenty of receivers, aren't there?"

"No doubt, but how do you get in touch with them?"

"I didn't think that would be difficult," said Pusey.

"But how?" I pressed.

"Hang it, I don't know," said Pusey impatiently. "People do get in touch with receivers, and what others can do you can, can't you?"

"Mr. Swan," said Solomon slowly, "probably knows the world a great deal better than Mr. Pusey. I have no doubt he will be able to sell the stolen goods. We can trust him."

"I don't want to go," I said suddenly.

"Don't be a damn fool," Pusey spluttered. He was getting angry. His plans were running awry.

"I will come with you," said Napoleon.

"No, you won't," I said grimly. I had had enough of the murderous little beast.

"When you think it out, you will decide to go," said Solomon easily.

It was a threat, I knew. And Solomon was not the man to make empty threats. No one knew where I was, and he could kill me with no fuss at all. He could do what Pusey had said he would do, communicate with the police. It was awkward.

"I'll come with you," said Napoleon again.

"How many would you like, Mr. Swan?" asked Solomon.

He was taking it for granted I would go. The threat had chilled me. And I wanted to help these little fellows if it could be done with moderate safety. I had nothing against them at all. Perhaps those darts would never be used. I might have been all wrong about that. Perhaps society would take to them as it took to the marmoset, as the latest in pets, but I didn't think so.

"Three would do," I said.

"Not enough," said Pusey. "I took ten."

"And a fine mess you made of it," said Priestley.

Pusey glared and got red, but they only smiled at him. He was a kind of joke to them, I could see.

"I'll choose two others," said Napoleon. "Bolivar and Tamerlaine. I want them to see the world."

"A lot of good it has done you," snapped Pusey sourly.

"A sound choice, I think," said Solomon. "Mr. Pusey, then, will go to Birmingham tomorrow. And Mr. Swan will set out for London."

"How do I go?" I asked.

"Perhaps Mr. Pusey will steal another van," mocked Napoleon.

"You can all go in the Ford," said Solomon.

"When will you be ready?" I asked Napoleon.

"Any time. Tonight if you like."

"I would rather sleep on it."

"Very well," said Solomon.

So I was to turn thief. I was already an accessory to a murder and the cause of another. And now it was to be theft on the grand scale. The curious thing is that I did not find the idea distasteful. I was pretty cynical about human beings, anyway. It would do them all good, to wake up to this thing that was happening to them. They'd rise one fine morning to find the world was no longer theirs; that it promised something better. No reasonable man would object to that, the way things were. And as for the sanctity of property, I had never seen the sense of worshiping in that church. It should be good fun . . . if it could be done safely.

A big if, I thought, as I slipped into bed that night. But I rather fancied myself as a criminal. Most of us do.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN I got up in the morning Pusey was not there. I asked Mrs. Jones what had happened to him.

"Such a to do," she said. "Solomon woke him this morning and told him to go somewhere. A nasty temper he was in, Mr. Pusey I mean, sir. Forced, he was, to walk to the station with his bag."

I had given him six pounds the night before. And now Solomon had wasted no time. Pusey had been sent packing. I could see him paddling his fat that five miles to the station. He wouldn't like it. If he met people he'd have to tell a tale about the car. I hoped they had thought about that. Someone might see me in the Ford if I left that day, and we didn't want to arouse suspicions, however vague.

"Your sandwiches do be in the car already," said Mrs. Jones. "And some food for the little brats as well."

I was left to my breakfast, and began to plan things. The more I thought of it the

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more difficult this business of burglary looked. I didn't know where to start with it. I would take the three of them back to my room in London. It should be easy enough to hide them there. But after that, what? I thought vaguely of pickpocketing, but did not think it would work. Tills? No, too dangerous.

Burglary was what I fancied. Work at night, but even that would not be simple.

Oh, well, the planning had better be left until we got on the spot.

At that in came Napoleon and two others. They walked towards the table.

"All right," I said, "there's no need to climb onto the table. I am just getting up."

"This," said Napoleon, "is Tamerlaine."

"How do you do," I said.

Tamerlaine was an inch shorter than the others. He had a flat, wide nose plastered onto his face. I thought I would know him again.

"And here is Bolivar."

"How do you do," I said.

Bolivar was black-haired, and thin. His face, tanned though it was by the sun, looked white in its setting of dark hair.

They looked at me.

"We are ready," said Napoleon.

"Are we to go now?"

"Solomon said we were to go at once."

"All right. Go to the car and wait for me. I shall be down soon."

I went up to my bedroom and packed. Icarus put his nose in through the door. "You off?" he asked, and disappeared. I carried my bag down to the car.

We set out by the moorland road, so as not to pass through the town.

I felt gloomy and depressed. I looked at the three of them, sitting against the floor board, and it did not help. I was setting out on a madcap adventure for which I was not fitted. I wanted to be safe somewhere, with a book and a fire and security and a pile of cigarettes. Why the devil had I agreed to go? A thin, insinuating little purple thought of treachery streaked through my mind. There should be no difficulty about giving them the slip. . . .

But the black liver mood did not last long. There was power under foot. One could tap it and set it humming with a slight pressure.

"You all right?" I asked.

"Yes," said Tamerlaine.

"Can't I see the country?" asked Bolivar.

"If you want to."

The three of them leapt up on the seat, and from there onto the back.

"Let go and fall if you see anything," I ordered.

I paid no more attention to them. They could look after themselves. The road was being drawn like a ribbon between the wheels. We averaged about fifty.

"There is something you ought to know," said Napoleon almost in my ear.

"What is it?"

"We have brought our razors."

I put on the brake and the car came to a standstill.

"I'm going back," I said, and started turning the car.

"No, you are not," Napoleon said quietly enough.

I felt the rage spurt in me, but it was no use. I would have to go on. They had their razors, and would not hesitate. I swung the car into the road again and went on.

"We must have a weapon," said Tamerlaine, "and the tubes are not ready yet."

IT KEPT on raining. The trees were bending gently in the wind and shining with wet. We dipped from the mountains towards the border.

"Can you go faster?" asked Napoleon.

I pressed on the accelerator, and the needle rose, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, and then wavered. It was too dangerous to go faster than that.

They began to laugh. I threw one glance at them, and their eyes were dancing. It was like taking three kids for a ride. They loved the speed. I could not help smiling.

At midday we pulled up and had our meal. They had a biscuit apiece, a quarter of an apple and a raw carrot. I munched my ham and veal pie and the sandwiches and found a bottle of beer.

After that I felt better, and began talking to them.

"You are going to steal," I said. "You know what crime is, don't you? Stealing is a crime, and anyone caught at it is severely punished."

"Not so long ago they used to hang thieves," said Tamerlaine, airing his knowledge.

"That's right, but they don't do that now. They put the thief in prison."

"We shall not be caught," said Napoleon. He had plenty of confidence in his razor.

"When shall we start?" asked Bolivar.

"Wait a minute. I want you to understand about this business of thieving. You may think it easy. It is not. We don't want to steal things of little value. We want to steal jewels and money. And people

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who own them take good precautions against theft. It is not at all easy."

"We'll get at them," said Napoleon.

"You can't open a steel safe, can you? Most money and jewelry is kept in steel safes."

"You tell us how to open them and we will do it," said Bolivar lightly.

"That's the devil of it, I don't know. You see, I've never stolen anything."

They were somewhat dashed by this.

The road rose to an upland of sparse trees and wide vistas. Away to the right about a half mile or so there was a hunt on. The hounds were streaming across the breast of a hill; first one on his own, then three, then a bunch. Behind them came the redcoats. I watched them strung out across the pale green, bending forwards in the saddle, the horses' legs like knitting needles.

"Look at that," I said, and waved a hand towards them.

The hounds were pouring through a gap, the horsemen pressing after. One by one they described a toy parabola in the air as they jumped over, the red coat rose in the air and sank again. Another rose and sank. It was pretty to watch. The hounds were crossing another field. I could not see the fox.

A grand car was pulled up at the side of the road. It shone there like a scarab. Further on a woman in furs had climbed the hedge and was looking at the hunt. I pulled over to the right, too, and passed her car slowly. As I passed close I saw her bag on the seat.

"Down," I whispered, and pulled up, on the right, behind her car. She was ten yards further on, and turned to see what was happening. Then she looked away again.

I leant over the back seat as if I were getting something.

"Napoleon. There's a car behind us. On the seat is a bag. The window is open. Take any money you find in it. You others, don't you budge."

They were sitting in the well. Each of them had a razor.

"You leave your damned razor there," I ordered.

Then I got out, leaving the door open a little, and went forward. I climbed the hedge too, a few yards further on than she was.

WE STOOD there, near but apart, in that wordless proximity which the English alone can manage. We looked sturdily at the hunt, streaking red up the far hillside, without a word, without a glance, poles apart, or at least a class apart, as I judged it. She had that beaky, set, inaccessible look of the class next. It sits on cross sticks at race meetings and appears in the Big Five magazines as the friend of. . . .

I looked at the hunt and glanced covertly at her, and wondered if Napoleon had done it yet. She put a hand up and pinched the fur mantilla round her throat. It was cold on top of that hedge.

Then I slipped like a fool, and the next second had my hands full of brambles. I gave her a quick guilty look; the kind of glance one gives when one is guilty of a social impropriety. She was looking at me with a smile sufficiently wide to show amusement but not wide enough to break through intimacy. God alone knows how they manage to ration their expressions so expertly. I was pinned by that smile into my category as neatly as a bug by an entomologist.

I climbed up again to have another gaze at the hunt.

She looked, too, but the facial expression was much more human. A faint after trace of the smile remained. I would have spoken to her then if it hadn't been for Napoleon.

The door of the Ford squeaked a little. Napoleon was back.

I climbed down the hedge in a compromise between dignity and humility, and went back to the car. She paid no attention at all. The wind blew at her skirts. She stood like a statue, with the furs pinched round her neck, against the sky. Nothing had happened in her world, A man had climbed the hedge, fallen, and was gone.

"Are you there, Napoleon?" I whispered.

"Yes."

I punched the engine into action and moved off smoothly. She was still a statue, all back, against the sky. Round the corner I put on speed.

"Napoleon," I called.

"Here is the bag," he said, and dropped it on to the seat.

"Damn you," I shouted, "didn't you hear what I said? I told you to take the money out of it. She'll notice the bag is gone and will make a hell of a fuss."

"Sorry," said Napoleon.

I slowed the car down, pulled up, and had the bag open. There were three five-pound notes, seven one-pound notes and about fifteen shillings in silver in a purse.

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I poured the silver into my trouser pocket, but didn't know what to do with the paper. If the woman saw her bag was missing she might give a description of me and the car. She might think I had an accomplice in the Ford. If I were caught with the bag and the paper money it would be bad, very bad. . . .

Hell, I thought, things were going wrong already. I had been a fool to tell Napoleon to do that.

Better get on as quickly as I could. I pressed the accelerator and touched sixty.

A horse and cart were coming towards me, driven by an old man, hunched on his plank of wood, with a fringe of white woolly beard round his face. He had a shawl over his shoulders. In his hands, resting on his knees, and reaching forwards, were the reins. It was Olde England in person, a sleepy anachronism.

I pressed gently on the brake and slowed up. He, like his opposite number on the hedge, paid no attention, sunk in his profound inward Englishry. I jerked the bag over into his cart as we went past.

There was still the money. I could not remember whether five-pound notes can be traced. It would be a pity to throw them away. There should be some way of hiding them, beyond reach of the police.

"What is disturbing you?" asked Napoleon.

I told them the police might stop the car. That would be bad. I had to get rid of the notes.

"Why not post them?" asked Bolivar.

That was the way their minds worked, directly, always. I had not thought of the post.

I stopped the car and got an envelope out of the bag. It was short work sealing the money in the envelope and addressing it. There was a book of stamps in my case. I addressed it to Pusey.

"If we are stopped by the police I shall open the door and you get out and hide under the car. Hang on to the springs or something. But for God's sake don't let them see you."

"We can manage," said Tamerlaine.

The letter was posted on the outskirts of the next village. I heaved a sigh of relief. The bag was gone, and the money was gone. They wouldn't look in the post box. For all that I was not easy in my mind. Every policeman was a tremor. I still expected a holdup until we got to town. That was late in the day, just as the lamps were flickering up. There was a feeling of sanctuary about London.

I DEBATED what to do with the car. There was also the problem of getting the three of them into my room. Finally I drove the Ford into the mews, took out my old car, garaged the Ford in its place and took the Standard round to a near-by garage. Whilst I was doing this the three men were sitting in the Ford. They didn't like being locked up, but it could not be helped. They were holding their razors tight, and looked suspicious.

We had an argument then as to how they were to be taken to my rooms. I wanted to take them one at a time, but they would not have that. They wanted to go together. Finally Tamerlaine suggested that I should put on my mackintosh. He and Bolivar would get into the pockets, which were big enough. Napoleon said he would sit next my heart, on the inside of my coat.

I started thinking about things during that walk from the lock-up to my room in Marchmont Street. It was a funny world. Somewhere in it there was a woman, very angry, no doubt, wondering just how the bag had disappeared from her car. And an old man with wool from ear to ear scratching his head over what he had found in his cart. And away north, in Birmingham, was Pusey, ordering lethal tubes. And there was I, walking the London streets in a semi-Bohemian wide-brimmed hat and a bulgy mackintosh and carrying a bag. Three little pigs went to market. . . .

I got upstairs all right without being seen. Napoleon, Tamerlaine and Bolivar climbed and sat in front of the gas fire. They were cold, and sat rubbing their hands.

"Where shall we hide if anyone comes in?" asked Napoleon.

The built-in wardrobe door was slightly ajar.

"You can make for that," I said.

Bolivar crossed the floor and had a look.

"We can hide there," he said, and went back to the fire.

I started unpacking the bag. When I was halfway through there was a knock at the door.

The three of them streaked away to the wardrobe.

"Come in," I shouted.

It was the Irish girl in her neat maid's uniform, with her fair hair tousling outside the cap and catching the light.

"It is you, Mr. Swan."

"Yes, I'm back again."

"We wondered where you were."

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"I went for a holiday, Lucy."

"In that car that called with the fat man?"

"Yes."

"Will there be anything you want tonight, or will you be going out for your dinner?"

"I shall dine out, I think."

She was a nice, simple girl, Lucy, always in good spirits, happy, I suppose, but dreadfully overworked.

"How's that beast of a landlady?" I asked.

"Ach, she's no beast but hard pressed," she said and left.

I put on the wireless. It was safer when it was on. No one would hear me talking to the three of them as they went past the door.

"You can come out now," I said. They came out and went to the fire.

"Do we begin work tonight?" asked Napoleon.

"No, not yet. I've got to look round first and think things out."

And that is how I left matters that night. I left them in the room and went out to dine in Soho. On the way I bought an evening paper.

The more I thought about it, the more difficult the business seemed.

Dinner over, I opened the paper. There was nothing in it. Then I had an idea and turned to Bunny's page.

Bunny wrote the social diary for that particular rag. She was a sweet girl, with a tremendous, inexhaustible enthusiasm for the rich. She was always excited, genuinely wide-eyed because one of them was expecting a baby or going to get married, or had broken an engagement or a leg, or bought a new hat, or was dining somewhere other than usual.

She snapped up the considered trifles of their little pernickety lives and wallowed in them, her blue eyes glinting over the recording typewriter. The telephone was at her ear day and night, she rushed about in taxis from one keyhole to another, and never, never got tired of it or bored by it. She was a pet and treasure, worth her weight in gold. And her stuff had to be watched like, like hell . . . the subs said, for she was innocently capable of astounding double meanings which would set the town roaring if they ever got past.

I WANTED to know what the rich were up to. It was all mush until I came to Tony Basuto. I had interviewed him once, an ostentatiously wealthy, much ringed pouch-eyed Armenian who owned race horses in England and manganese mines in the Colonies. I remembered his house in Mayfair. There were paintings of the race horses in the hall, samples of the manganese in the library. He had made me drunk and laughed at me. And afterwards he had lectured me on how to be artificially sick.

There was nothing wrong with Tony Basuto, except that he was showy and mean. There are worse men in the temperance movement.

Tony Basuto was back from Brazil. He had been out to Minas Geraes to smell out more manganese. His daughter, Isabel, had been left in Rio, "exotic Rio," said Bunny. The point about it was that she had hooked a man there, a young French count, so far as I could make out. That had so pleased papa Basuto that he had cast about for an extra special wedding present.

The very thing had turned up at Goyaz. A laborer there had kicked up a tremendous diamond. It had happened within a mile of the place where the Gaekwar of Baroda's 255 carat gem had been found. The Gaekwar (trust Bunny to look it up), had paid 80,000 pounds for it.

This diamond was only ten carats lighter, and Basuto had gone for it head down. 70,000 pounds he had paid for it, according to Bunny. That must have given him a pain. According to Bunny again, "it would cut beautifully." It wouldn't dare do anything else in her column. It was to be given uncut to daughter Isabel, to do what she liked with it. No doubt Isabel's husband would pay for the cutting. That was like Basuto—showy and mean.

Bunny went on: "We shall see this exciting monster diamond, at the display of wedding presents next week."

That was what I must get, the uncut diamond. Good, raw, unrecognizable wealth. Diamonds were more easily disposed of than anything else. In all the thrillers I had ever read there was a steady flow of diamonds, cut and uncut, to Amsterdam. I would send something really big trundling along that underground route.

The waiter got an extra large tip.

For three days I was busy. First, I had to find out when the display would take place. I called on the chief reporter of one of my old papers and had a look in the assignation book. The preview for the Press was on Tuesday. There was plenty of time.

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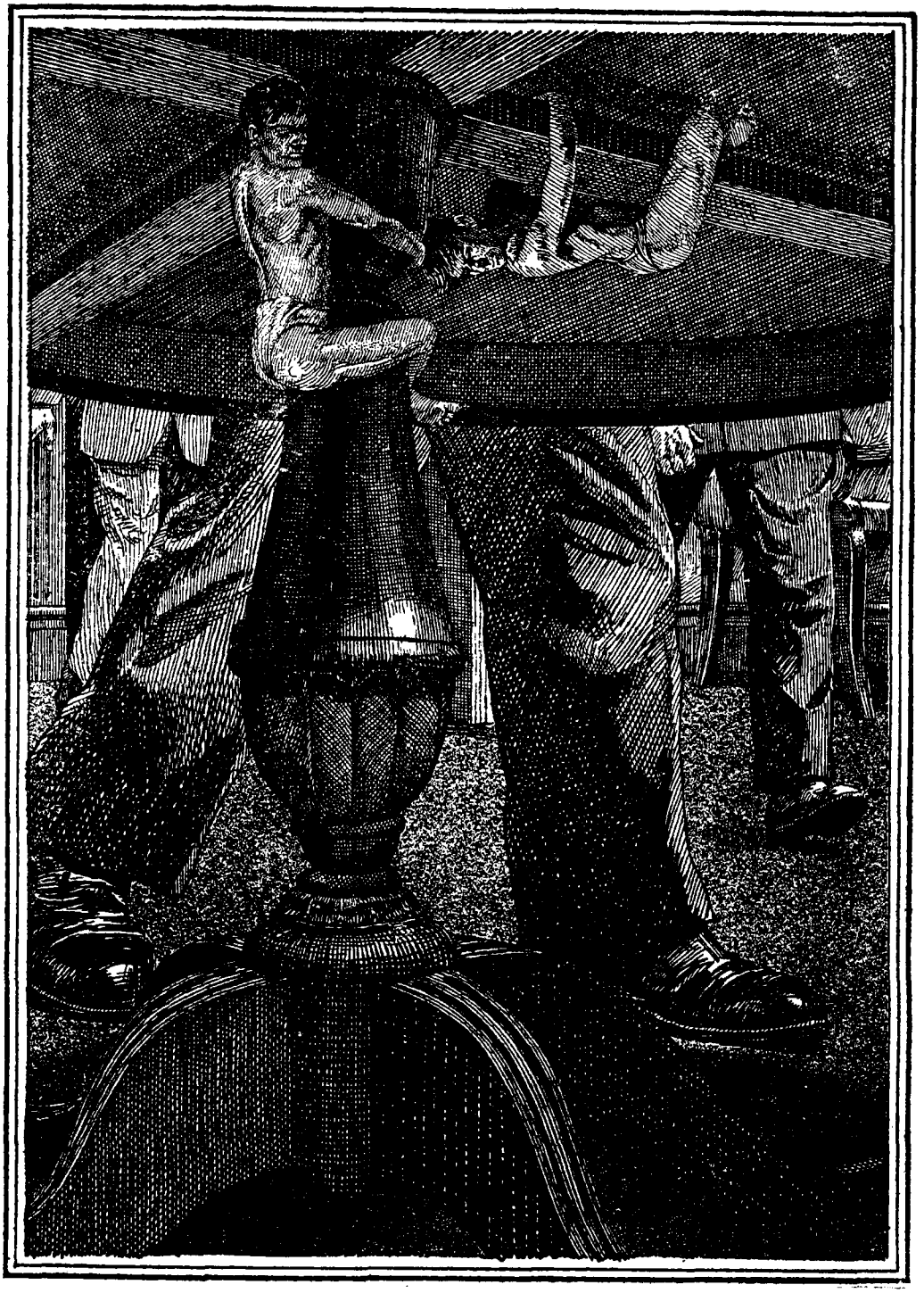

"We had only just got under the table, when the three men came charging in!"

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Then there was the mansion. I spent a morning over that. It was at the corner of Menton Street and Turin Street. The front was on Menton Street. Turning left into Turin Street one ran along the side of the house, and then for about thirty yards skirted the high garden wall. The front was bare as bare, not a pipe or anything showing. It was the same with the side. but the back was more promising. A water pipe ran up the wall from the garden to the roof under the attics. It would present no difficulty to the men. They could go up the pipe and into the house through the attic rooms. They were probably used by the staff.

The drawing-room was on the first floor, and went through from back to front. Walking along the opposite pavement in Turin Street, and glancing up over the garden wall, I could see the lustres shining in the chandeliers. It was in that room that the presents would be shown. I had been to displays like that myself.

Turin Street was narrower than Menton Street. Both were narrow, like many of the streets in that golden triangle. And they were more or less deserted at night. That would be all to the good so far as slipping the men over the wall was concerned. But it would be the very devil hanging about waiting for them to come back. I might have to wait an hour or two. A man walking up and down the street would be uncomfortably conspicuous if he had a bad conscience. I did not like the idea at all.

I worried and worried over that. Someone would be sure to see me and remember when the story appeared in the papers. There should be little difficulty about stealing the diamond, but getting away was a problem.

I went to see the mansion again. In Turin Street there was an apartment house which I had not noticed before. It looked very Mayfairy, with a highly polished revolving door through which there was a glimpse of deep-piled rug in the hall and a section of gold touched stair spiralling up. I went in boldly and asked if there was anything to let. A girl, bright, hard and painted, with poster-white teeth, said there was one flat. Flats she called them, but they were single rooms, with a bathroom off.

I said I would see it, and up we went, to the third floor.

The room looked out on the street. The white teeth cascaded apologies. There was not much noise, she said.

The room overlooked Basuto's garden.

I rented the room for a week and paid a deposit. We went down and I stepped from the muffled pile onto the pavement, feeling like a camel when it finds hard Cairo streets under its pads after desert sand.

Later I was round again with my luggage in the V-8. A wizened, hollow-chested runt of a man with a dark flush on his cheek bones rose from the basement and carried them up.

Then back to Marchmont Street to explain to the men. They had been indoors for four days, not stirring. It was beginning to tell. They were listless and bored.

"When do we begin?" asked Napoleon.

Not yet, I explained. Patience, patience. Two or three more days and they would be in action. Then I told them what was in the wind, drew sketches and plans, allotted them their several tasks. They pored over them, intent and wordless.

"Will the drawing-room be locked?" asked Bolivar.

"I do not know. We'll have to risk that. They usually have one or two ex-policemen watching."

"In the room?" asked Tamerlaine.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not."

"We can always kill them," said Napoleon.

"No, damn you."

"How shall we carry the diamond?" asked Bolivar.

I had not thought of that. He spread his pink palm and closed his fingers. But they would want both hands for climbing the pipe. Besides, his hand was not big enough.

"I'll get you a small bag you can sling round your neck. You can put the diamond in that."

They nodded.

Then there was the business of getting them over the wall.

"That'll be the west wall of the garden. They probably have pear trees trained against it, but just in case, I shall get you a rope."

"String," said Napoleon. "We do not need a rope. A string is less noticeable."

I went out and bought a small leather tobacco pouch, punched holes in it and put a length of stout string through. Napoleon tied it round his neck and shortened the string.

I saw to it that they had food, biscuits and apples and currants. I had to sleep, for the sake of appearance, in Turin Street. Two or three times a day I padded up the muffled stairs.

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TUESDAY I spent in Marchmont Street, slipping out to buy edition after edition of the evening papers. All three carried stories in the four o'clock edition.

We went through them carefully, but there was little that was new. There was plenty about the diamond. Tony Basuto had spun them the yarn, with fresh touches, but there was nothing helpful, except in Bunny's diary. Bunny mentioned detectives, "sleuths" she called them, on the watch. There was also a paragraph about the insurance. Bunny was raking hard in well worked ground.

I told them about the detectives. They might be in the drawing-room all night or in a room near-by. It was impossible to say.

"Shall we be able to see?" asked Napoleon.

Another thing I had not thought of. I rushed out to buy a pencil torch and put it in the pouch. Napoleon said he would carry the pouch.

"One of you will stay in the garden," I said. "He will arrange for your getaway."

"Tamerlaine," said Napoleon. "Bolivar will come with me."

"What do I do exactly?" asked Tamerlaine.

"You wait and watch, with the string. They might want it to get down from the wall to the street."

"And after we get into the street again?"

"I'll be there, walking up and down. Perhaps you will be able to hop off the wall onto my shoulder as I pass."

"This is all very vague," Bolivar objected.

"Hell! It's got to be vague," I said. "Come on. Time to go."

I put the three of them in a suitcase and went round to Turin Street. In the room I let them loose again and pointed out Basuto's garden to them. It was dark by then, but several windows were lit in the house.

We could just see the pipe running up the back wall.

"It goes past the drawing-room window," said Napoleon. "If we can raise the window we can swing out from the ledge onto the pipe. That will be better than going up again through the attic rooms."

"I doubt if you are strong enough for that."

"We can try, if necessary."

The lights in the drawing-room went up, but there were curtains drawn at all three windows .

We watched for a while.

"What do you think the staff is doing now?" asked Bolivar.

"Dinner will be on," I said.

It was beginning to rain. There was a swish of it across the pane.

"When do we go?" asked Napoleon.

"Now. Come along."

I looked out into the street once more. There were a few passers-by, heads bent against the rain. I put on my mackintosh in the dark. The room lights were not on.

"In you go."

I picked up Tamerlaine and put him in the right pocket, then Bolivar in the left. Tamerlaine had string wound round his wrist. Napoleon slipped the pouch over his head and climbed up the edge of the mackintosh and snuggled under my arm. I was sure that none of them carried a razor.

I put my hands in my pockets, resting on the heads of Bolivar and Tamerlaine. In the light corridor it looked as if my hands were thrust deep.

I went boldly out, and was glad to see the girl was not there. Through the swing door and then straight across the street. There was no one there at all. The rain was getting heavier.

"Ready, Napoleon?"

"Yes."

I put my hands inside, grasped him round the waist and flashed him on top of the wall. I could just reach it.

"Trees," he said, and dipped over at once.

I gave a hasty glance up and down the street and across to the house opposite, pretending all the time to be searching in my pockets for cigarettes. I could see nothing, and twice in rapid succession swung Tamerlaine and Bolivar over.

That done I walked quickly up the street and round the block. In five minutes I was back in my room again. Once more I was lucky. No one had seen me go in or out.

From the window I stared out into the garden, watching the pipe. But there was no sign of anyone climbing it. Perhaps they had already got up. The lights were still on in the drawing-room.

Their instructions were to hide themselves in the house until midnight, when the staff would be in bed. I had four hours to wait. It was useless watching at the window. Better draw the curtains, turn on the light, and wait.

I ordered over the house telephone some smoked salmon sandwiches, a bottle of

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Beaujolais, and black coffee. They were a long time coming, and the tray was brought up by the basement runt.

"Come and clear away in an hour," I ordered him.

"Yes, sir."

"You've cut off the crust. Hell."

He gave me a nasty look.

"Did you say with the crust, sir?"

"No, but you might have asked."

"Shall I have them changed, sir?"

"No, leave them."

He left like a ghost, softly closing the door behind him.

I devoured the sandwiches, drank the coffee, and started on the bottle. Time dragged. The runt came back to clear up.

"Leave the wine."

"Yes, sir."

Again he was gone. I sipped the wine. It was no use looking out the window. The time must be passed somehow.

But at eleven I could stand it no longer. Switching off the lights I went to the window. The rain had cleared off a little. The drawing-room lights were out, but the attic rooms were blazing. The staff was going to bed.

The three drawing-room windows were dark, but there was a light in one of the windows alongside. That would be a room next the drawing-room. Perhaps the detectives were there. It was no use watching. I drew the blinds again, switched on the light, and vowed that I would not go to the window again until midnight.

The bottle was finished and I was feeling slightly muzzy. It was a silly thing to do, but I couldn't help it. There was no letting it alone until it was finished. I tried to stop and couldn't. I would hold it for ten minutes and then find myself pouring out another.

IT WAS ten minutes to twelve and there was no more drink. A cold, restless irritation welled up. I walked up and down, yawned, looked at the clock. It must be damnably cold for Tamerlaine in the garden. And what were the other two doing now? They were crouched somewhere. Thank God they had no razors. They would be talking, telepathizing.

I couldn't stay still, and when I walked there was an occasional tremor in the legs. Nerves! That was not the sort of criminal I had imagined myself to be. I felt rotten.

A shrill blast of whistles sounded outside. I raced to the switch and nearly fell, then back through the suddenly dark room to the window. Lights were popping up all over the house. A car raced by. A policeman came running down the street, then another. Another car came zooming along. It was crammed with policemen craning out the windows. What the devil was up?

Policemen came racing back from Menton Street and spaced themselves out along the wall. The house was being surrounded. I could hear windows opening on my side of the road.

What in hell had happened?

Every window in the house was alight. Then lights appeared in the garden. The police torches were busy there swinging amongst the flower beds and trees. A drawing-room window was pushed up and a head and shoulders appeared. The man shouted something to the searchers in the garden. It was odd to see all the spots of light swing in the same direction whilst they listened. Then the search went on.

Now they were searching the paths, the blobs of light moving to and fro slowly on the gravel. One of them examined the wall and the pipe, looking for scratches, toe marks on the brick. The light moved up and down along the pipe, up and down again. I didn't think Napoleon and Bolivar would leave any marks.

Where was Tamerlaine hiding? In one of the trees?

The lights ebbed away from the garden until they were all gone. I knew the way the police worked. First they surround the house, then they look in the garden, then they search every hole and corner inside. Soon they would be out on the roof.

And in less than five minutes, there they were, leaning out of the attic windows, throwing lights along the gutters, up along the wet slates. One of them crawled out and went over the neighbouring roofs.

I champed in the window, wondering what to do. Where were the three of them? How had the alarm been raised? Had they already got away from the house into the garden? Possibly into the street? At that thought I leapt to my feet. But no, they could not possibly be in the street. The policeman would have seen them. There was quite a crowd now, talking to the bobbies. There was no place for them to hide in, anywhere. I slid down again to my knees.

The lights disappeared from the roofs. The garden was deserted. They had not found Tamerlaine. The policemen along the wall turned and walked towards Menton Street. That must mean that it was

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all over. They had drawn blank, or caught the two of them.

What was I to do? What was I to do?

The crowd had followed the bobbies. Turin Street was deserted, and the windows were closing again. I threw mine up and looked out. There was still some movement in Menton Street. As I watched the two police cars moved slowly away. It was half past twelve by my watch. The crowd would dissolve soon, and then I would go out. I couldn't stay at the window all night. I must do something.

For a moment I was tempted. Why not go to bed and leave them? I would be well rid of the whole affair. They could go to blazes as far as I was concerned.

But they depended on me. I had planned the burglary for them. They were probably waiting for me now, somewhere. No, I could not let them down like that. I must see this through.

Napoleon had a torch. It was just possible that he might signal. There was nothing I could do save watch and watch. Tamerlaine might appear on the wall. I scrutinized the top of it from end to end again and again, but there was no sign.

The house was darkening down. The three drawing-room windows were a blank, but the next room was still lit. There were other lights here and there.

It was impossible to stay in the window longer. I must go out. So I rose and switched on the light and got into my mackintosh. Then I switched off the light and had one last look out of the window. My eyes were getting accustomed to the dark, when it happened.

Besides, I am certain I heard it happen. A pane of glass in one of the drawing-room windows crashed out. The pieces fell tinkling into the garden, breaking on a path below the window. The next instant the two of them were on the ledge outside. I saw one of them leap for the pipe, then the other, and two shadows slid down it quickly and out of sight. Then the drawing-room lights flicked up.

But I did not wait for more. I ran out of the room, crashing a chair over, and went down the stairs four at a time. The discreetly lighted hall, something blue they had in it, was empty. I was out of the house through the glass swings in a trice and walking across the street. Two sharp blasts rang on the air. The police whistles. I raced across through the rain until I was under the garden wall.

"Napoleon," I whispered, and walked along. I did not dare stay still.

I felt a blow on my hat, another on my shoulder and nearly cried out. A third fell on my back and slid down, nails scraping. The police whistle shrilled out again, and I stood still, as if listening. But I wasn't listening. I was confounded by the turmoil in my mackintosh. One of them was flattened against my chest. I could feel his quick panting. The second had tumbled into a pocket and was trembling there against my leg. The third had thrust himself bodily up my sleeve.

There was no time to lose. I walked rapidly out into the middle of the street and looked towards Basuto's house. The windows behind me were going up again.

"Where is it?" someone shouted.

I looked up. There were several people in the windows.

"There," and I raised a hand towards Basuto's house.

AT THE far end of the street I could hear the whine of a racing engine. The police were coming. I backed on to the pavement as it flashed past, and then turned into my door.

That was all right. I was safe. In less than a minute we were up in my room, the curtains drawn and the light on.

"Come along out," I ordered.

Napoleon took hold of my tie with one hand and pulled himself out. I sat down to help them. Tamerlaine came out of the pocket. It was Bolivar who had thrust himself up my sleeve.

"I am cold," said Tamerlaine. He was still trembling.

I put a match to the gas fire. The three of them sat before it on their haunches.

"Well, got it?" I asked. Napoleon's pouch was bulging.

He took the pouch off his neck and opened it.

"Here it is," he said, and the stone rolled out. We all looked at it.

"I'll put that in my pocket. All right, everybody? No one hurt?"

They shook their heads.

"When you're ready, tell me about it."

I switched off the light and peeped out through the window. It was happening all over again. Policemen were strung along the wall, facing it, with their batons in their hands. Lights were flashing in the garden, and the whole house was ablaze. I let the curtain fall into place and walked back to the fire.

"We got into the house through the attic room," said Napoleon. "There was no one about. We crept downstairs to the

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first floor and hid on the landing behind a chair. The drawing-room door was open, the lights were on, but there was a man in there. We could hear him turning the leaves of a book. Two other men were playing cards in the room next, with the door open. We waited a long time.

"A lot of people went up and down the stairs. After a while the house grew quiet. Everybody had gone to bed. The two men playing cards strolled in to talk with the man in the drawing-room. We could not hear what they said. They turned off the light and went into the room next door, all three of them. The drawing-room door was ajar, and Bolivar and I slipped in. It was difficult to see anything, but I used the torch and saw the diamond. It was on its own, in the center of the table. I lifted it up and immediately a bell rang loudly in the room next door."

"A nasty shock!" I said.

"We had to be pretty quick. Bolivar was on the table with me. I told him to hide under the table. We jumped off and scrambled up the center leg and clung to a cross bar at the top. We had only just got there when the three men came charging in and put on the light. 'It's gone,' shouted one of them. Then they ran to the window and blew their whistles. Two of them did that. The other went to a telephone.

"A number of men came into the room and talked. There was one man who gave the orders. They were there a long time. Then the lights were turned out and the door locked."

"Where were you all this time?" I asked Tamerlaine.

"Up a tree in the garden. A torch was flashed on me once."

"Go on, Napoleon."

"I had put the stone in the pouch and we slid down the leg of the table. We were feeling cramped, but that soon wore off. We wondered what to do. The door was locked and we could not open the window. We did not know where you were or whether we should be able to get away if we got out into the garden. But we had to risk that. We got hold of the poker in the grate and went back to the window. We looked for your window and found it. Bolivar thought you would be out in the street waiting for us. I thought you would be in your room, watching, but of course we could not see you. Just then your light went up. 'Smash it,' said Bolivar, 'perhaps he will hear. He is bound to hear the police whistles when they blow them.' So I smashed the window. The rest was easy."

"Do you want anything to eat?"

"No," they said. Tamerlaine looked sleepy. He unwound the string from his wrist and yawned.

"All right, to bed, everybody. I'll take you back to Marchmont Street tomorrow."

I pulled out the divan bed and threw the cushions between it and the wall. They slept on a cushion each. I got to bed, too, but could not sleep for a long time.

That was over. We had got the stone. And the Yard was faced with a nice little problem. I knew how they would work. They'd go through the M.O. of each jewel thief on their books. One man worked this way; another that. And still they would be scratching their heads. Not one of them would fit this crime.

Then they would go over the evidence once more with a tooth comb. Someone had got into the drawing-room, stolen the stone, and got out again. He *must* have got out again, before the three detectives had rushed in. Had he left the house? Query. Doubt. If he had, well, that was that. If he hadn't, the stone must be hidden somewhere in the house.

"Search again," the inspector would shout, irascibly.

"But listen, sir. . . ." And then they would start on the other point.

There was no one in that room when it was locked. Yes, they had looked up the chimney. No, there was no one up the chimney. You can't get up a chimney anyway without making marks. . . .

But someone had got out of that room, smashing the window with a poker. . . .

Then the inspector would get a brain wave.

"He hid the stone in his room before running for it. And when the three of you were snoozing away in the next room. . . ."

"We were not snoozing."

"When you were snoozing in the next room, I say, he came back with a key and let himself in."

"Then why didn't he go out the same way?"

"Hell, how do I know? He smashed his way out of the window and skipped it over the garden wall."

"Listen, it was somebody in the house. He skipped back into the house again."

"The door was locked."

"He had a key to it."

And they would have no faith in any theory. No faith at all. They would worry over it and gnaw at it and the Chief and the Home Secretary would bite at them

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until they were stark mad. Pray God that Mac would not remember his performing monkeys. I was hitched up vaguely in his mind with those and if he found that I had been staying in Turin Street he'd be nose down on the long trail.

It was a nice little problem for them. And I had another. How was I to turn the stone into cash?

I fell asleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE morning I took the three of them round to Marchmont Street in an attaché case. It was not comfortable, but they stuck it without a squeal. The papers said that an arrest was pending.

Bill Louis, star crime man, had a new theory in his column. Bill had seen the absurdity of the whole affair and suspected the police were holding back essentials. His theory met all the points. The burglary was the work of an Invisible Man.

I grinned. Bill was at his old game of poking fun at the police. He was always prodding away at them. He would be working with them now on the Basuto case, and he'd go on pleading in his shrill girl's voice, blue eyes innocently wide open: "What you got to look for is an Invisible Man." I could see the inspector sweating and swearing under his breath and itching to chuck him out. Bill's invisible man was the only possible solution, anyway.

I wished I were with him to share the fun, but I had the stone to sell.

It was no good going to a receiver and trying to pass the stone. To begin with, I knew no receiver. In the second place, I would be sure to muff it. The fellow would not trust me, and would rat on me in the bat of an eyelid. If it were ever discovered that I had spent a week in Turin Street, and been seen in the company of a known receiver, I would soon be snaffled. Every receiver in London was now being watched anyway. No doubt the police were waiting for the thinnest skein to blow into their hands. If they ever connected me with Turin Street and a receiver I would be done for.

And then I remembered. It was not true that I did not know a receiver. I did know one. Eight years before, I had contributed a series to the *Sunday Gazette* on crime, and two of the articles had been about receivers and the way they worked. I had got the stuff for those articles from a man named Gilroy, just out from a stretch of three years. I wondered where he was now.

I rang up Davidson, of the *Sunday Gazette*. Davidson was in charge of the feature pages.

"That you, Davidson? Yes, it's Swan. . . . No, no job yet. Trying my hand at freelancing. Say, it struck me . . . do you remember? I did two or three stories on receiving about eight years ago? Good. This would be a grand time to hand out the dope again, what with this Basuto diamond and all that. Yes, quite. The business has been organized since, I'm told. How about putting me in touch with that fellow Gilroy, yes, Gilroy, G—I—L—R—O—Y, who gave me the stuff in the old days."

Davidson was not for it at first, but he warmed up, and promised to let me know where this man Gilroy was. He would phone up the Yard and ring me back. I gave him the number.

Ten minutes later he was telling me that Gilroy lived at an address in Camden Town. He had been out a month since his last job. Receiving again.

I took the stone and went to Camden Town. I found the address easily enough. It was a mean house in a mean street. A shabby woman with a beaked, dirty face smeared with make-up came to the door, wiping her hands on a sacking apron. I asked for Gilroy.

"Watcha want with him?" she asked suspiciously.

There was nothing to be got out of her, I saw.

"All right, take it," I said roughly. "Police."

She almost spat at me, but there was fear in her eyes.

"Ain't it enough that he should report regular . . . ?" she began.

"Come along. Where is he?"

"What for should I tell you dirty dogs. . . ."

"As you like," I said, and turned on my heel.

That frightened her. "Here, mister," she shouted, and then said that he'd probably be playing dominoes at Milligan's.

Milligan's was a low pot-hole two streets away, with dirty cloths on marble-topped tables, an electro-plate teamaker hissing on the counter, and a fly-spotted menu in the window. Milligan, a one-eyed scoundrel with a blotchy face, was behind the bar, reading a racing edition.

"Where's Gilroy?" I asked.

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"How should I know," he muttered. "What do ya want with 'im?"

"All right," I said, and walked into the inner room through a green baize rag which smelt of soup and tobacco as I pulled it aside.

There was only one man there, and it was Gilroy. I had forgotten what he looked like, but I remembered when I saw him. It was Gilroy all right, with a neckerchief around his throat, a bowler tipped to the back of his head, and a free, daredevil look in his eyes.

"I remember you," he said at once, chucking his paper on the floor. "What do you want this time?"

"Same thing," I said, sitting down opposite. Milligan came to the baize and I ordered a pot of tea.

"How much?" asked Gilroy.

"Plenty, but let's wait till we have the tea."

I gave him a cigarette, and we lit up.

"How long have you been out this time?" I asked.

"A month. It'll be concentration camp next time."

"You're not taking a job, eh?"

"Hell, no." He spat on the floor. "The old game is good enough for me, talking to you newspaper blokes, I mean."

That was meant to be a joke, so I laughed. Milligan brought the tea. It made me sick to look at it.

"Writing about crime, still?"

"Yes, that's it. I want a story again, the same as last time. The public is interested in the way that man is going to get rid of the Basuto stone."

"Gawd!" said Gilroy. "If I could get my hands on that! But the damn fools won't come to me now. They think I'm done."

"But you've no money, Gilroy! That stone would be no use to you."

"I could get the money, couldn't I?"

"Could you?"

"You bet I could. You hand me that stone and see. Oh, boy!"

"All right," I said. "I will hand you that stone. Here, take a look at this."

I pulled the stone out of my pocket and put it on the table.

"Gawd!" he said. Then "Gawd!" again. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped his mouth.

"HOW the hell. . . ." He was looking at me with eyes the size of saucers.

"Don't you worry," and I put it back in my pocket again.

"Wait a minute," he said, and got up. I saw him taking a peek through the baize, then he came back and whispered:

"See, I don't want to know how you got that. Nothing, see, but I'll give you six thousand clear for it."

"No," I said, "it's not enough."

"Keep it," he snorted. "Keep it."

"I will," I promised.

"Plenty of kudos for me, getting that stone back for the police," he said.

"And plenty of money if you handle it. Tony Basuto paid seventy thousand for it."

"Gah, so he says!"

"I'll give it to you for ten thousand, in one pound notes."

"Here, let's have a look at it."

I took it out of my pocket again and handed it over. He turned it about and about.

"All right," he said. "I'll take it."

"Hand it back," I said.

He looked at me and handed it back.

"Meet me tomorrow morning," he said. "I'll have the dough."

"I'll be here, same time."

"See, kid, take care of that and don't go fooling around. Ten to one the narks will know you've been with me. How about that?"

"I've been to see you about a story for the *Sunday Gazette*. Next Sunday you'll be in the paper with a yarn about how the thief will get rid of the Basuto stone."

"That's good." He slapped his knee. "That's damned good."

"You had better give me the story now. Tell me, how will the thief pass on that stone?"

"That's good," he roared. "All right, I'll give you that stuff. Listen, boy. We'll put a good 'un across them."

I was with him a quarter of an hour, taking him down in shorthand. Then he led me out through the baize.

"Here, Milligan. Meet my friend from the newspapers."

"How do you do," said Milligan, with a twitch of a smile in the sea of blotches.

"Come along out," said Gilroy. We went out together.

"We got to be seen," he whispered. "Come along. Let's find a policeman."

We found one at the corner. Gilroy went up to him.

"You got your eye on me, ain't you?"

"Good morning, Mr. Gilroy," said the bobby stolidly.

"See you tomorrow, same time, eh?" said Gilroy to me.

"I'll be there," I said, and walked off.

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I rang up Davidson and told him I had a story about how the thief was going to pass on the diamond. Davidson asked me to let it run. He would take three columns on that.

"If the thief isn't pinched before Sunday, that is," he added, "I'll give you thirty for it."

"Okay," I said, and rang off.

Back at Marchmont Street I told the three men.

"I've sold it," I said, "for ten thousand pounds."

"Is that a great deal of money?" asked Napoleon.

"It will keep you going for a long time."

"When do we steal the next diamond?" asked Bolivar.

"You don't. We go back to-morrow."

They looked neither relieved nor pleased.

I went along and paid for my week at Turin Street, then went back to Marchmont Street. The evening was spent in typing out Gilroy's story. It read well, I thought.

I paid my bill at Marchmont Street, too.

"I've got to go again to-morrow," I told the Irish girl.

She looked sorry. She was a nice girl, Lucy. I could not tell her how long I would be away, this time, but the room was to be kept on.

"If you are ever asked about this week, will you say I stayed here?"

"Yes, if you want me to."

"And, Lucy, would you mind swearing I was in all evening on Tuesday?"

"I don't mind. Sure. Anything to oblige."

I got up early next morning, packed, and took the three men round to the garage. They were willing to be taken in the attaché case now, but they took their razors with them.

I parked the Ford round a corner in Camden Town and told the men to lie low.

Milligan waved a greeting, and I passed through the baize curtain. Gilroy was waiting for me.

"Everything all right?" I asked.

He nodded.

"You hand over the stone."

"No, you hand over the money."

"I got it, don't you worry."

He pulled ten packets, one after another, out of his pockets. I counted one of them, and there were a thousand pounds. I didn't bother to count the others.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, and handed over the stone. He looked at it and turned it over and over for some time and then slipped it into his bowler hat.

"How did you get all this?" I asked, tapping a packet.

"Don't you worry," he said. "I got it, isn't that enough?"

"Yes," I said.

"There are still people who can trust me, see?"

We sat talking for about ten minutes, then I got up, shook hands, and walked back to the car. A few streets away I posted my story to Davidson.

And there it was, all over. The car hummed along the North Circular, westward bound once more. Somewhere in the back were the three men. And way out west, in the Welsh hills, they were waiting for us.

I wondered how Pusey had got on at Birmingham.

FOR the next three weeks nothing much happened. It was October and great gales swept in from the sea, bending the trees like whips, inland. Leaves swept up from the coastlands and swirled in the air like a flight of sparrows. The days were dark and unlovely, with mist, rain, and high winds. Soon the trees were bare as poles, swaying to and fro like women bereaved. The night came down early from the woods, folding us in on our lonely upland. The white house, shorn of its surrounding plants, looked taller, bolder, grimmer, each day. I went about with my greatcoat flapping gustily about my legs.

But the little men and women were busy, busier than I had seen them before. They were more concentrated, more intense. Solomon lived in the porch, and all day long they were running there to consult him, to take their orders. Icarus barely gave me a glance. Lucilla ignored me. No one paid any attention. The lights were lit early in the laboratory and remained until far into the night. Poor Pusey was leading a dog's life.

"No sleep," he moaned to me. "Always at that damn poison. There's no end to it. I'd like to take that brute Lavoisier in my hands and squeeze the life out of him."

Pusey was changed. This was a harassed, irascible Pusey who moped over his meals and groaned aloud when Priestley came to fetch him.

"I can't keep this up much longer," he told me one day. Then, explosively: "To hell with them."

He was not like that when I came back from the trip. He was exalted then,

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rubbed his hands, drank a good deal, whistled, was full of bonhomie, worked with a will at the laboratory.

"Ten thousand! Ten thousand! That's something like."

Then, with an arch look at me: "We must arrange another little trip, eh? Another little trip. There's no reason why we should stop at ten thousand. A flea bite, yes, sir, a flea bite. I tell you, we could *use* these fellows if only they'd be sensible."

That lasted about four days. Then he and Solomon had a long talk, and the gloom fell over him.

"I don't like it," he told me at dinner that night. "Solomon is riding for a fall. If only . . . but what's the use of talking about it!"

"What is happening?" I asked.

"How should I know? A lot he tells *me!* But all the same, keep your eyes open."

I kept my eyes open, but could detect nothing abnormal. It was true they were busy, but then, they always had been.

Once an odd thing happened. I saw Mary rushing along a corridor, clad in white, with a nurse's cap on her head. I was interested, and went after her into the second floor room. There were three men there, dressed in white, and two more nurses. On a tiny table set in the middle of the floor a woman lay stretched out. One of the men was bending over her, stitching up a wound in her chest.

"What is happening here?" I asked.

One of the men came forward and motioned me to sit down. There was nowhere to sit save the floor. I slumped down and he told me in a low voice.

"The operation is just over," he said. "Pulmonary embolism," he added, looking up hopefully.

"I know nothing about surgery," I said.

"The patient," he went on, "had a slight operation for varicose veins five days ago. To-day she was taken ill. Aesculapius. . . ."

"Which of them is he?" I interrupted.

"The one who is stitching her up now. He thought it was embolism and rushed her to the table. She died just as he was preparing to operate."

"But you don't operate on the dead, do you?"

"She was dead, in a way, and yet not dead. What had happened was that a clot had choked up the two branches of an artery leading from the heart to the lung. Aesculapius had two minutes in which to enter, incise the pericardium—that's the tissue round the heart—open the artery and take the clots out from the branches."

"Good lord! But why two minutes?"

"If the blood is kept from the brain for longer than that the tissue is damaged and they never recover. They always die, although they may live for a day or two."

"Did he manage it?" I asked.

"In one minute forty-five seconds. And he did it without tearing the pleura."

He realised that I was at sea.

"That's the delicate membrane covering the inside of the chest wall and folding back on itself to cover the lungs. But this can't possible interest you."

"Oh, yes, it does," I protested. "Tell me, do they often do this operation?"

"About one in five hundred people who are operated on die in that way," he said. "There's nothing wrong with them, apart from this clot which frees itself from the scar of the wound into the blood stream. It might happen to anyone, after the simplest operation. A man called Trendelenburg began experimenting on calves about 1904 and became convinced that an operation was possible which would save the patient. But he died without a single success.

"Others took up his work and modified the operation. Hundreds have been tried, but so far only ten have been successful. A man called Meyer, who committed suicide under Hitler, had four successes. The others are all Scandinavian except for one by an Italian. There has never been a successful case in America, and this is the first success in England. If she lives," he added.

"How often has Aesculapius tried it?" I asked.

"This is his first. Of course he has practiced on cadavers."

"Have some of you died already, then?" I asked.

"No, but Solomon has killed a few."

I remembered Cosmo.

"How long do you people live?" I asked suddenly. The point had never struck me before.

"We do not know, yet," he answered.

Aesculapius was washing his hands. Mary was dealing with the instruments. The man saw me looking.

"We had great difficulty over the instruments," he said. "They had to be specially made."

"Do you think she will live?" I asked.

"There is no reason why she shouldn't," he said. "But you never know, with patients. If she survives the next few days

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and does not get pneumonia she should be safe."

I got up and left the room. I had been more staggered by this than by almost anything else I had found about them. I could not get used to the idea that they were running a hospital of their own.

I WENT for a walk through the fields at the back of the house and came to a disused slate quarry. There was no one there and I sat down to smoke a cigarette.

Suddenly from behind the stones and bushes, about fifty of them appeared. Many of them were women.

"We wondered who it was," said Napoleon. "Our look-out gave us warning. He doesn't know you yet."

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

He threw forward a hand. In it I saw a black object, about the size of a small cotton reel. It had the blue sheen of gun metal on it.

"What's that?" I asked.

He flicked his wrist and the reel elongated itself into a tube.

"So they have arrived?" I asked.

"Yes," said Napoleon.

"And the darts, too?"

"Yes, plenty of them. Here you are."

He handed me something not unlike a needle, except that one end was blunter.

"How do you use it?" I asked.

"Like this." He put the dart into the tube and raised it to his mouth.

"Look there," he said, pointing with his hand. "Do you see that turnip on the ledge of grass?"

I could see the turnip, and nodded.

"Look."

He lifted the tube to his mouth and, as it seemed to me, puffed into it without taking aim. A little man rushed towards the turnip and peered at it.

"Hit," he cried, and took something out of the turnip.

"Good lord!" I said. "Here, let me try."

Napoleon fitted a dart and handed me his tube. The little men scattered comically. I raised it to my mouth and blew with all my might.

There was a roar of laughter. One of them cried out: "I saw it go there," and he started looking, about five yards to the right of the turnip and two yards below. Then he picked something out of the grass.

"Here it is," he said.

"What was wrong?" I asked.

"You blew too strongly," said Napoleon. "These tubes are graded to the size of our lungs. Lucilla made a good job of it."

"Does it require much practice?" I asked.

"Not much. We work at it for two hours a day. All of them can hit that turnip at twenty-five yards now."

"The drop of poison on the end may make a difference to the flight," I suggested.

"We thought of that, but it doesn't."

"Have you tried it yet?"

"The rabbit you had for dinner last night was killed like that," said Napoleon.

"But damn it, one can't eat flesh that is poisoned!"

"Curare makes no difference. You haven't been ill, have you?"

"No," I admitted.

"We have to go on with our practice now," said Napoleon, and waited for me to go.

I went.

TWO mornings later, I was awakened by someone shaking me roughly.

"Hey, wake up, wake up."

It was Pusey's voice.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Come and look."

A high wind was rattling the window, now greying into dawn. Pusey was outlined blackly against a pane. I pulled on a dressing gown and joined him, shivering.

"What the hell is it?" I asked irritably.

"Look, man."

I peered out of the window. The porch was directly below. Beyond, the road curved round the wood, now brushing the leaden sky in great sweeping motions with its branches.

"Look up," said Pusey.

And then I saw them, like a flock of large birds, the whole two hundred and fifty of them. They were on the wing, some hovering like hawks, some rising vertically like kites, others swooping and curveting with the grace and inevitability of sea gulls.

One of them rose and rose above the others until he was a speck in the sky. The wings closed and he hurtled down, down, head first, with wings folded until he was a hundred and fifty feet above the ground. Then the wings opened out gradually and gracefully, and he whistled past the window in a long curve that took him within a yard of the grass and lifted him high into the air again.

"Do they do it for fun?" I asked. "It must be one of the most exciting things on earth."

"They do nothing for fun, you mark my words," said Pusey. "There's something behind this."

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"But I don't see . . . ."

"There's *something*," said Pusey.

Suddenly they all came planing down on to the grass like great bats. The air was emptied of them.

"That'll be a warning from the look-outs," said Pusey. Then savagely, "I wish that fellow, Lavoisier, would break his damned neck."

I climbed into bed and lay staring at the ceiling for a long time.

And one day Pusey and I went walking. We followed the path to the open space where Solomon used to keep school, and pushed further into the wood.

"What is that splashing noise?" I asked.

"Oh, that's the bathing pool. I wonder they still use it in this cold weather."

"Can I see?"

We turned off the path between the trunks and came to a pool of water. Above it a hazel bent gracefully.

I was surprised to see Solomon on the branch, directly above the water. He nodded to me, then stood upright, placed his finger tips together, and dived. He rose to the surface, shook his head free of water, and climbed up the bank.

There were fifteen of them around the pool. One after the other they climbed up the hazel and dived. There was a look of radiant health about their bodies. Their faces shone with delight.

"They are happy," I said to Pusey.

Mary was now on the branch, poised to dive.

Her beautiful body streamed through the air and cut into the water.

"Pusey, did you see that? What a perfect dive!"

But Pusey was looking bored, a trifle sniffy.

"Open your mind," said Solomon to me, "and we will do our best to give you the feeling."

I threw aside reserve, and opened my mind. I wished, that is, to receive any message they could send. And by and by, such a stream of clear joy flowed through me as I had never known before.

"Pusey," I cried, "they justify themselves in that alone."

"If it were only that!" grumbled Pusey on the way back to the house. "But you watch. There's something in the wind."

AND now I come to the crux of the story, the twenty-third of October, 1950, a date no one is likely to forget. The day had passed like so many others. I went for a walk, chatted with the men and women, and then turned into the library to enter up my diary and complete the "Statement," as it has come to be called. I had been working on this for some time—it was not, as some have said, an impromptu talk over the telephone. I had forseen that, sooner or later, such an explanation of Minimum Man would be necessary. But I did not realize then that it was so soon to be made.

That evening Pusey and I had dinner early. Pusey was tired and had a headache.

We sat in silence after dinner, until, quite suddenly, Pusey brought his fist down on the table.

"It can't go on," he said. "No, it can't. Here am I working myself to the bone, and what for? Nothing. When I suggest another trip to Solomon he smiles and shakes his head, just as though I were the village idiot."

"They don't use money," I said soothingly, "and so you can't expect them to get excited about it."

"After all I've done for them," said Pusey.

"Gratitude, that's another thing they can't understand."

"I shouldn't have got them those tubes," said Pusey. "Now they've got the upper hand. I should have dominated them from the beginning, ordered them to do this and that, and if they disobeyed, killed them."

"You couldn't do that, not kill them."

"*They* do. I've been soft. I could have done anything, anything with them, but like a fool I taught them to speak and to read. I look like a millionaire now, don't I? The chance I've lost," he moaned. There was misery in his eyes.

"You're not looking at this the right way," I said. "You will reap your reward all right, when the time comes. You'll be buried in Westminster yet for what you've done."

"I don't want to be buried in the Abbey," he shouted. "I want to dine at the Ritz."

"You'll do both. Damn it, *all* the credit is due to you. If it were not for you there wouldn't be Minimum Man. Sooner or later Mrs. Jones would have put them in the bucket. There's no doubt about that. They are yours."

"But how will people take to them?" he asked, mollified a little. "They'll probably hate them."

"Give them credit for some sense," I said. "It's no good hating them. Here they are, and come to stay. If they are used properly and given the help they need, they'll change the world in a hundred years. There is their passion for truth, their intelligence,

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and their discipline. Lucilla was telling me this morning that she had gone beyond Einstein. And I believe her. You've never caught one of them in a lie, have you?"

"No," Pusey admitted.

"There you are! No, people won't hate them, once they get used to the idea. Minimum Man will do what Homo Sapiens would have done if it weren't for his over romantic nature, his pugnacity and his grab. This is mind as untrammeled as you are ever likely to find it, my boy, and they'll get there. Good luck to them, I say."

"That's pretty humiliating, for us," said Pusey.

"And don't we deserve the sackcloth and ashes?" I retorted.

"Yes, in a way," he mused. "We'll want to use them, pick their brains, harness them to our way of life."

"Well, why not?"

"That's the point," said Pusey. "I know them better than you, and I don't think they will let themselves be used."

"We've still got a lot to teach them."

"Oh, yes, and they'll make good learners, but afterwards? That's the point. What happens afterwards?"

"Oh, they'll compromise," I said.

"They don't know the meaning of the word," said Pusey grimly. "You mark my words, humanity . . . we, that is, are in for a fight. And I don't like it."

He shook his head dismally.

"They're clever. There are so many of them. And they have no conscience. By God, you could win a world with an army like that."

"Oh, come," I said, "you are exaggerating."

"A world," said Pusey, and looked at me.

I sat up and attended. He had something on his mind.

"I am a realist," said Pusey, and looked at me again.

"That remark usually preludes something particularly dirty," I said.

He paid no attention to that.

"We've got to see things as they are. You and I, we know what these fellows are capable of, given a chance. You and I know they will never be given that chance. That right?"

"If the thing is rightly handled. . . ."

"It won't be rightly handled. You can be certain of that. Solomon has no tact, no savoir-faire. He will make a mess of it, sure to. Well, here they are, two hundred and fifty of them, with tubes and darts and poisons. And there's Jellaby. Tell me,—even in the hills of Wales he lowered his voice,—"you want to get rid of him, don't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"But it is no use playing with two hundred and fifty. We want many times that number. And why shouldn't we? That ten thousand pounds of yours could keep them going for a long time."

"If you could hide them."

"I have hidden them five years. I could hide them another five, bar accidents. Patience, that's what we want. Patience."

"And then?"

"Down on them, like the wolf on the fold, my boy. I could give them victory, if they obeyed. But I insist on obedience. I'll do the planning. Solomon can carry out. But I must be boss. I must."

The laboratory had bitten into his soul. The easy liver, the slothful fat man, had been ordered to do this and that, had been kept from his sleep and humiliated. And he was revolting against it, trying to assert himself, in a world of dreams so far. Pusey saw himself as the Conquering Hero. The man who could not run a van load of men to London without coming to grief, found no difficulty about organising an army and usurping Jellaby. Such was his astounding vanity. I am tolerably certain that he saw himself already at Downing Street, acting as Solomon's viceregent. Solomon, that was the rub. Would Solomon agree to these plans?

"Have you no pity on poor humanity?" I mocked. "You were all for them and against the little men not so long ago."

"I am a realist," said Pusey, and looked very stern and forbidding.

He enlarged upon his plans for an hour.

EVEN as we were talking over the coffee things were happening which were to reveal the existence of the colony to the world.

The first sign of anything amiss was the arrival of Solomon. He came in through the half-open door—all doors were left ajar in the house to permit them entry and exit—and he hesitated on the threshold. There was a frown on his face which brought out the scar on his eyebrow.

"What is it, Solomon?" I asked.

"You haven't seen Bolivar?"

"No. I saw him this afternoon, about three o'clock."

"He has been seen since then," said Solomon, and he went out through the door.

"Come along," I said to Pusey, "we must look into this."

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We went out into the hall, and there was Icarus sitting on the bottom step, with his chin in his palm.

"What's all this about, Bolivar?" I asked.

"He is trying a new pattern wing," said Icarus. Then he added slowly, his eye on us: "And he has not come back."

"In which direction did he fly?"

"The wind rose as the sun was setting. I fitted him with wings and he took off from the roof, not too good a take off. After a while he rose into the air, but he was still unsteady. Then he passed over the wood in the direction of the town. The last I saw of him was five hundred feet up, over the ridge."

I went into the library, now, to speak to Solomon. It was as near a premonition as I have had in my life.

"I don't like this," I told Solomon. "You should be searching for him."

"We are. Thirty of our men have spread out fanwise over the ridge. They are searching now."

"I'll take the car and go down to town. If he has been seen and picked up, the police will know about it now."

Solomon nodded.

"Take this with you," and he gave me my Statement, which had been left on the table.

"I have read it, and approve. If Bolivar has been found, you can let your people know."

"I can telephone the papers? Dead or alive?"

"Yes. It had to come out some time. But keep to your Statement."

"I promise."

I put on my greatcoat and took the Ford from the garage. The town was only six miles away.

Its lights were twinkling below in the valley as I crested the ridge. Now and again, when it was safe to do so, I lifted my head to the sky and searched there. But it was black night. There was nothing to be seen.

Mardre is a close-packed small town with a wide main street lined with trees. On the outskirts are one storey cottages, squatting low and white by the roadway. As the road penetrates, the buildings get higher. The whitewash disappears. Ugly Victorian houses of three and four storeys rear their roofs higher than the trees. The town reaches its climax in the Lion Hotel, its immense portico surmounted by a lion squatting on its haunches.

I parked the car in front of the hotel and went in.

The moment I came to the bar I knew the worst had happened. It was full of men, most of them from the town. Two of them looked like commercial travelers. When I pushed in, there was a silence, and they all looked in my direction.

"Any more news?" a tall, hatchet-faced man in shabby tweeds asked me.

"What news?"

"Here's one man who has not heard, anyway," someone said in the corner, and a few of them laughed.

"Have you not heard about the man from Mars?" the hatchet face asked me, grinning at a bowler-hatted neighbour.

"You shut up, Joe," said the bowler hat. "I did not say he was from Mars. I said he might well be."

"Whisky and soda," I ordered the barmaid.

"Here, you tell him, Mr. Griffiths," said the tall man, pushing forward a stout young farmer.

"Two whiskies and soda," I ordered, after one look at him. He was half-way to being soused already, with a fleck of red in his cheeks.

I handed the drink to him.

"Well, what's all this, Mr. Griffiths?" I asked.

"Here's your good health," he said, in the Welsh sing song.

We drank. And then he told me, leaning against the bar. The others crowded round and listened, their heads tilted sideways, as if they had never heard the tale before. Their faces changed subtly as the story went on, expressing perfectly the emotions they felt. It was very un-English.

THE story the young farmer had to tell was a simple one. As night was falling, he told me, his sister had called him out to the yard because there was a hawk hovering above the barn. He had taken his gun with him and slipped a cartridge into the barrel. The light was already poor, but he could just make out a large bird, something like a hawk and yet different. "Shoot him, quick," his sister had shouted, so he had put the gun to his shoulder and given it a barrel. The bird fell like a stone. He had heard it banging on the ground amongst the hayricks. He and his sister had then looked for it, but with no success. It was getting too dark.

"That was not a hawk," he had told his sister, when they got back to the house.

"The great fool you are, of course it was," she had replied.

So, out of pique, he had taken a lantern

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and gone to look for it again, and this time he had found it.

He sipped at his drink and paused dramatically. There was suppressed excitement on the verge of release in all the listening faces. They knew what he was going to say next, but they longed to hear it all the same.

"It was not a hawk," he said solemnly.

"No?" I asked, playing his game. "Was it dead?"

"It was that."

"What was it, then?"

"A man, the size of a foot rule, with canvas wings."

The crowd stirred and sighed. The story had reached its cilmax.

"Through the heart I had shot him," said Mr. Griffiths.

"Murder, that's what it is. Well, then, manslaughter," said the fellow in the bowler. And at that they boiled up into argument. Mr. Griffiths was forgotten.

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"At the police station. Myself it was took him there, in a basket, but he was dead."

"Perhaps he was an angel," I heard someone shout. One or two laughed coarsely.

"He was a man," shouted Mr. Griffiths.

"Men the angels are, too," the bowler hat retorted.

"Got a telephone?" I asked the barmaid.

"In the hall, sir."

I pushed my way out and got to the hall. The telephone was in a box. I asked for the Press Association.

The call came through in fifteen minutes.

"I want Robertson," I said.

Robertson was there, by good luck.

"This is Swan," I told him. "Listen, I am going to tell you a story you will not believe. But you must believe it. When you have heard it you will remember that I have been sacked. You will think of any number of reasons why it cannot be true. And yet I swear to you that every word is true."

"What's the matter, old man? You sound hysterical. What is it?"

"Listen, I'll give you the whole dope. Put me on to a shorthand man."

The account of what had happened at Mardre that evening was dictated over the telephone. I repeated the story the young farmer had told me, described the excitement in the bar, and then went on to my own prepared Statement.

I recounted the history of Minimum Man in the order it had happened, the birth of the twins, Mrs. Jones' employment by Pusey, Pusey's attempts at educating them, the growth of the colony, and my association with it. I suppressed Pusey's raid on London, and lied about the way I discovered them. The Statement contains a pretty story of a walk over the hills, and a woman found ailing in the bracken. That was the only positive untruth in the whole of it. I suppressed also the theft of Basuto's diamond and Pusey's journey to Birmingham. The activities of Minimum Man were given in full.

I wanted sympathy for them above everything, and doctored the story accordingly. But in the main it was true. I dwelt on their intellectual activities, particularly Icarus' experiments in flight (but without mentioning that they could all fly), Lucilla's mathematics, the modelling of the Makers of Beauty, the operations at the hospital, and Solomon's leadership.

I outlined their educational system, their telepathy, their simple, humble, disciplined life. The things which I supressed were those which would antagonise. It was no use revealing then their eugenic programme, and Solomon's killings, the outrage of their marital relationships (for such I felt it would be to the ordinary man and woman), and their lack of the softer emotions, the conscience, pity and love of our own lives. In short, I tried to present them to England as miniscule Englishmen, Tom Thumb editions of their own selves, with a few harmless additions in the way of telepathy and intelligence.

There was no good reason that I could see why they should antagonise the public more than, say, our university professors. I hated dwelling on their intelligence. And yet, in fairness to them I had to. I knew they would get no sympathy on that score. But I made them out to be very harmless highbrows and suggested, as delicately as I could, that Englishmen could now sit back and rest from the inimical and laborious business of thinking. Minimum Man would be glad to do it for them. That was the best I could make of it.

And then there was that purple passage at the end, its cadences borrowed from Milton, how Minimum Man was proud to be English, how he would maintain and enhance our prestige, lead us possibly into a Renaissance of art, letters and trade. (I was careful to add trade.) With these active and original minds at our disposal, England would head the world once more in science and the mechanical application of science. A new world was upon us, of

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marvels as yet not even glimpsed. . . .

I overdid it, rather.

When the Statement was finished Robertson came to the telephone again. It was he who was hysterical now. I had to swear to the truth of it several times, on my honour. His conversation turned into a series of exclamation marks, and I cut him off.

There was nothing more to be done in the town. I did go down the street as far as the Police Station, with the blue lamp over its door. There was a small crowd of people there, most of them women. A policeman at the door refused admittance curtly. I showed him my Press card, but he was not impressed.

"I know nothing," he said, and turned the face of Jove upon me. There was no use bruising against that barrier. The police, upon instruction, no doubt, were mum. I went up the mountain again.

Pusey and Solomon were waiting for me in the drawing room.

"He's dead, shot through the heart," I said.

Solomon nodded his head slowly. There was no sign of emotion in his face. "I thought something of the kind had happened."

But Pusey did not take it so kindly. His face flushed and he gripped the arm of his chair.

"There you are," he spluttered. "It's all over now."

I knew what he meant. His dreams of loot and conquest were over. No more predatory raids on London, no more easy burglaries, no triumph against Jellaby. It was all over.

"Why the hell did you let him fly?" he asked Solomon.

"He wished to," said Solomon simply.

"He should have been stopped . . ." he began.

"Shut up, Pusey," I said.

"All right, I will shut up. I wash my hands of them. It's up to them now."

"Yes," said Solomon, "it is up to us."

The news had spread. Possibly Solomon had telepathised it to those who were in the house. I could hear the loud crying of Mrs. Jones in the kitchen. One of her children was dead.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE next three days were a nightmare. Early in the morning a police sergeant called to see Pusey. Pusey refused to see him, and I had to talk with him instead. He was out in the porch and when I came upon him was peering round the pillar cautiously. He straightened himself briskly.

"Mr. Pusey?"

"No, Swan, a friend of his."

"Well, the message is for Mr. Pusey."

"He's not well. I'll do instead."

"It's about what is happening down below. It's . . . it's a fair do. About five hundred motors before breakfast, and all mad as hatters."

"What is the matter with them?" I asked.

"They all wanted to come up here, but the Chief says no, they must not. The roads have all been blocked. He wants to know if there are people you want to see. If you give us a list of proper visitors, we shall see what we can do."

"Keep them all away," I said.

"Well, there's the Press."

"Keep them away, too."

"It will be difficult, but we'll do what we can." He hesitated. "I suppose it is true, is it, what you wrote in the papers?"

"Yes, of course."

"Could I . . . I don't suppose I could see one of them?"

"Icarus!" I shouted. "Icarus, come here." I knew he was in the house.

"Didn't you see the dead man?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, last night."

"What has happened to him?"

"He's sent up to the Home Office. There was an aeroplane come to fetch him this morning."

I saw his eyes goggle and glance behind into the hall. Icarus was there.

"This is Icarus," I said. But the sergeant was not listening. He was staring at the man.

Icarus came forward slowly and halted by my left boot.

"This is a sergeant of police," I explained. "He saw Bolivar."

"Tell me," said Icarus to the sergeant, "was the canvas still tied properly to his left elbow?"

"You mean the little fellow who was dead?" asked the sergeant, bending double almost. "Yes, I noticed that the canvas was tied to the wrist and the elbows and then went round under the armpits to the back and the knees."

"Are you sure it was tied close to the left elbow?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then there is something wrong with that model," said Icarus. "I felt sure that the ribbon had worn loose round the elbow, the way he was flying."

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And with that he turned on his heels and was gone.

The sergeant wiped his brow with a handkerchief.

"Beats anything I ever heard of," he said. "How many are there?" he asked suddenly. I had not disclosed this in my Statement.

"Oh, lots," I answered vaguely.

"How many?" he asked again.

"Hundreds," I said, and looked him in the eye. No doubt he had been instructed to ask this.

He went away briskly down the road, turning his head from left to right.

Nothing more happened until eleven when a motor cyclist drove up and delivered about a thousand telegrams. Pusey looked at them and shouted for Mrs. Jones.

"Put the whole damn lot on the fire. All of them."

I rescued three from the pile and opened them. One was from a patent food manufacturer, offering two hundred and fifty pounds for the right to advertise Minimum Man as customary and satisfied clients. The second was from a magazine offering "the highest rates of pay in monthly journalism" for an article on anything by Solomon. The third said, "Please reserve a room, will pay highly," and was signed Joseph Smith, from an address in Wimbledon. I threw the three of them on the pile burning in the kitchen grate. Perhaps it was as well, I reflected, that Pusey had opened none of them. He did not know what a fortune he was sending up in flames.

We were having lunch when there was a loud knock on the door. Pusey rose and went out into the hall. I heard a woman's voice, and then Pusey's raised in rage.

"Off you go. No, I won't say anything. No, you can go to blazes. This is private, I tell you. *Private.*" His voice rose into a sort of scream. The woman's voice went through it, interwoven, without a pause. I heard the door slam. Immediately the knocker was used again. Pusey bellowed with rage and the hat stand rattled. A gust of air indicated that the door had been flung open again. Through the window I saw a woman flying along the grass, with Pusey in pursuit, a stick raised above his head.

But Pusey could not run far. The distance between him and the woman increased, and he stopped, holding a hand to his side. As she doubled the wood he turned round and started walking back. His face was purple.

"A woman reporter," he said, "come right through the police cordon. She was filthy with mud. Did you see her boots?"

"No," I said.

"Filthy. Absolutely filthy."

HALF an hour later an aeroplane circled low. The passenger was leaning out and taking photographs. Soon afterwards the motor cyclist arrived and more telegrams were flung on the fire.

"We can't keep the pace," said the driver. "The lines are choked."

"All right," I said. "Take this wire for the Press Association."

It was a brief message, explaining what was happening to all telegrams sent.

During the rest of that day the messenger drove to and fro. There seemed no end to the telegrams.

About four the sergeant came back. He was looking tired.

"This is terrible. I have never seen anything like it. We had to put a man every ten yards in the hedges, they kept dodging through so."

He consulted his notebook. "There are about fifteen newspaper men want to know if they can see you, and about a hundred and fifty photographers."

"Right. I'll make a note of that. Any particular time?"

"Any time that suits them."

"Then there's a lot of film men all wanting to come."

"One again, tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, I'll tell them."

"Then there's a tooth-paste man, a fellow with corsets, a cough cure merchant, a . . . ."

"Cut them all out, Sergeant."

He turned over a fresh page and looked down it.

"Oh, and there's a woman from a missionary society. A proper tartar."

"She can come tomorrow."

"Well, I don't advise it." The sergeant grinned.

"I should like to see her."

"Then there's something from Oxford, got a religion too. Sorry, but I did not write that down very plainly. Sounded to me like the croup."

"An Oxford Grouper, was it?"

"That's right, sir."

"Keep him out, for God's sake."

"And that's about all, I think, except about twenty thousand people who just want to come up for no particular reason."

I gave the sergeant a drink and sent him away.

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Ten minutes later the pressman and the photographer arrived. They had drawn lots. The *Manchester Guardian* reporter and the *Daily Mirror* photographer had won. They had an arrangement with the others to share their stories and their photographs.

"You Swan? How do and all that. Trot them out," said the cameraman, a brisk, chirpy young fellow, quick in his movements.

"How many do you want?"

"Three of each will do. Two lovelies and one plain for the girls. Solomon and two toughs for the men. Okay?"

"They all look pretty much the same, you know. I can hardly tell them apart."

"Okay, trot them out." He was a pushful, enthusiastic young man.

"Where do you want them?" I asked.

"Indoors will do. Got a table?"

"Come into the dining-room."

I led him and the *Guardian* man indoors. He was older and wore glasses. He removed his hat.

I went out and collected three men and three women, then led them into the dining-room. The reporter, catching sight of them, smiled soberly and fiddled with his glasses. The cameraman whistled.

"Gosh, it's true then!"

"You want them on the table, do you?"

"Yep."

They climbed up on to the table, via the legs. The photographer got his camera ready.

"Hello, folks," he began. "Now then, just to crack off we'll have one of the ladies. You, my dear." He pointed to one of them. "We'll have a close up. You stand here, and I'll hold the camera low. You'll come out as big as a real woman. . . ."

"I am a real woman," she said.

The cameraman was put out by this.

"Forgot they could talk," he muttered to me. He turned to the girl again. "Now, my dear, there will be a flash. Don't mind that."

"No," said the girl.

He got his camera ready. The girl faced him.

"Now, smile, please, smile, smile, smile."

The girl smiled. She was very beautiful. There was a flash.

"Good. Now one of the men."

"Now then, let's have a spot of action. You, my man, and you, my dear. Get out of the way, you others. Now you run away from him, sweetheart, compris? You, my man, you chase her and catch her by the hair. Then I'll shoot."

"Why should I do that?" asked the man.

"Oh, you know, nature red in tooth and claw and that sort of thing."

"I will not do it," said the man.

"Well, then, we'll cut that out. How about you taking her in your arms and kissing her? That would make a good shot."

"We don't kiss," said the girl.

"You never kiss!" The young fellow was flabbergasted.

"No, never."

"Well, then, look. Just hold hands if you like and gaze at each other, all soppy you know."

"Why?" asked the girl.

"Because our readers expect it, my dear."

"I think we will go now," said one of them, and started climbing down from the table.

"No, here, wait," he pleaded, but one by one they climbed down and left the room. He took two shots of them slipping down the leg.

"Damn stuck-up little ninnies," he muttered.

He was upset. Then he snapped at me, suddenly.

"Might as well have you," he said. "Where's that fellow, Pussy?"

"Pusey," I corrected. "The house is free for you. Take what you like. Perhaps your readers will be interested in the laboratory and the hospital."

"Thanks. I'll see." And he went out, camera in hand.

"May I talk to some of them?" the reporter asked diffidently.

"I'll take you to see Solomon. Come along."

SOLOMON was in the library, with a copy of the day's *Times* in front of him. I introduced the reporter.

It was an odd interview. The reporter was deferential, contained, and intelligent. He asked no silly questions, and Solomon took to him. He liked Solomon, too, I could see.

"Your companion," said Solomon, "has upset the people he was photographing. He asked them to do ridiculous and unpleasant things."

"He is the faithful servant of the public," said the reporter quietly.

"The apologia of the devil's imps for their misdeeds," said Solomon, smiling. "Will you please tell me what you want to know?"

"I would like to know how you think your people can be dovetailed into our social system," asked the reporter.

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"First," said Solomon, "I want to explain to you in what way we differ from human beings, apart from our size altogether. The mutation is not merely a physical one. It is mental as well. Our power of conveying thought by telepathy is sufficient to convince you of that."

The reporter nodded.

"I have been reading Mr. Swan's statement. It is, in most respects, a truthful one, but he has made many concessions to . . . how shall I put it? . . . human vanity. We have been introduced to them as miniatures of themselves. It makes a good impression no doubt, but it is not true."

"In what way is it untrue?"

"Will you please take my words down?" said Solomon. "There must be absolutely no mistake."

The reporter took his notebook and pencil.

"To begin with," said Solomon, "our men and women, freed of love and the tissue of complexities bound up with it, submit gladly to the eugenic programme I have imposed upon them."

The reporter pricked up his ears at this.

"Do you think it wise, Solomon?" I warned.

"If we are accepted," he said, "we must be accepted on our own terms. We can make no compromise with humans."

And then he went on to explain in detail his process of selection, the colony's engenic programme, his method of dealing with the failures.

"It is a simple and almost painless death," he said.

The reporter had the story of his life, but he laid down the pencil.

"I agree with Mr. Swan," he told Solomon, "It is inadvisable to report this. Most people will be horrified."

"I cannot help that," said Solomon. "It is all or nothing. We are as we are, colder, if you like, more ruthless you will say, less at the mercy of emotion and more in the control of reason. If humans consider that a misfortune, it is their business. Please report exactly what I say."

"Freed from all nonsense about romance, the brain can be used unhindered for the purpose of design, the search for truth. The difference between us and you is that your passion for truth is intermittent, ours is constant and continuous. You will see what a tremendous gulf that places between us. In my opinion it is unbridgeable."

"There should be room for you," said the reporter.

"Yes," said Solomon, "but is there room for humanity as well?"

The reporter was staggered as I was by this indiscretion.

"Am I to say that?" he asked.

"Yes. Please do not hesitate."

"On what terms are you prepared to work with us?" he asked.

"We must have perfect freedom. To begin with, I insist that this colony should be ruled according to its own laws and not according to human laws. In the second place, we must be allowed to grow in numbers to any extent we consider advisable, at the expense of the human community, if necessary. We could, if it was wished, mingle with humanity, or we can segregate ourselves on an island. The Isle of Wight would be admirable. We could take over the whole island in a few years."

"These are hard conditions," said the reporter. "If I understand you correctly, you claim complete liberty to form a state within a state, and if necessary, you claim a superior right over the human state in the matter of land."

"Exactly," said Solomon. "And we make these claims because we are superior in every way, except in force." He ruffled the *Times* contemptuously. "You have only to read a single issue of this journal to realize that. You have come to the end of your tether. Look at this," he turned page after page, "bickerings about property in the Law Courts, clashes between capital and labor, a civil war in France, violent deaths by the hangman and the motor cars, droolings in the theater and cinema . . ."

"It is true," said the reporter. He was a human being now, making a case for himself. "It is true that we appear lost. But you must remember that we are at the beginning of the adventure. We are still on the lower slopes, harassed and clogged by our emotional natures. But our story is a story of the gradual organization of ourselves on a human basis. Some day we shall be free."

"Free of what?" asked Solomon. "Free of emotion?"

"No, but in control."

"Fiddlesticks. You can never be free. You can modify and repress, but free yourselves, never. There is no way out."

"We reach out beyond our animal selves. There is beauty, poetry, architecture, music, astronomy, mathematics."

"THERE is all that," Solomon admitted. "But how long have you been masters here now? Several million years? And still

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these positive activities are only one per cent of the whole. Perhaps less. I do not know."

"But it is the very combat with ourselves which is our justification," said the reporter. "Our natures may be vile, but we rebel against them. Pity is the obverse side of anger, courage of fear, love of hate, selflessness of ambition. There is no badness without its parallel good. And on the whole, we do try."

"Pity, courage, love, selflessness," mused Solomon. "What are they? Further deviations, a waste of time and effort, salves to your conscience, but they lead you nowhere. They are necessary only because you are what you are. Why must one human being pity another? It should not be necessary. I have never found it necessary to pity one of my colony. Courage is only a virtue amongst cowards. We take it for granted and are not aware of it. And love? There can be no love but for the work. Why waste it on each other? We are as one in mind and body. Is not that love?

"When I find it necessary for one of my community to sacrifice himself consciously for another, then I shall have failed as a ruler. I tell you it is not necessary in a well organized community. If I find one of my men or women revelling in that debauchery you call altruism and self-sacrifice I shall kill, without mercy. Our food, our property, ourselves, our work, we hold in common. There is then no room for those fancy feelings you so pride yourselves upon."

"Poetry," murmured the reporter, and in a low voice began repeating:

"The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

"We, too, have poetry," said Solomon. "I sensed what you felt when saying the last two lines. I have the same sort of feeling when pondering a mathematical equation."

"And so," said the reporter unhappily, "you propose to do away with us."

"To use you, shall we say? For you can still be useful. What else are we to do? Even you admit that there is such a thing as purpose behind the act of living. Minimum Man is not here by accident. And we are obviously meant to displace you. Can you suggest any other reason? This is not a blind throw of nature's, you can be sure. Its only possible object is to get us to do for the sum of things what you have failed to do. We shall pick up the broken threads and . . . carry on. Some day we, too, will have to make room for a being with more absolute intelligence. If you cared for the purpose and the work you would make way for us, gladly."

The interview was over, and I escorted the reporter out.

"He is not an egomaniac, is he?" he asked.

"Anything but. There is nothing wrong with his assumptions. Minimum Man *is* like that."

"My God!" said the reporter.

IT WAS an uneasy night we spent at the house. Solomon had ordered the colony indoors. They were sleeping above my head somewhere. About two in the morning I was wakened by a scuffle and a shout outside the window. I jumped out of bed and peered into the darkness. Two stalwart men were leading a third away, their hands on his coat collar. An hour later Pusey came creeping in and sat on the bed.

"I am tired of all this," he said.

I lit the lamp. He had a sunken, deflated, discouraged look about him. There were caverns under his eyes.

"There's going to be trouble," he went on. "I can feel it in my bones. Solomon is . . . pugnacious, won't listen to reason, damn him."

"He has his point of view."

"*His* point of view. Only *his* point of view. That is the difficulty. He won't see sense. There are only two hundred and fifty of them. They can't *do* anything."

"What do you want them to do?"

"If Solomon goes on like this we will be attacked. It is bound to happen. I think he wants to antagonize them, wants to. And then what?"

"And then what?" I repeated.

Pusey made a large, sweeping gesture. I understood it was meant to illustrate annihilation.

"They can play hide and seek," I suggested.

"But in the end they'll be cornered. And then what is to happen to me?"

"Why, nothing will happen to you."

"I spent several thousand on them," he went on, casting a quick glance at me. "I

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am too old now to start all over again. I would hate that."

"Well?"

"You've got ten thousand, haven't you?"

"What is left of it, yes. We've spent a thousand on more tubes and darts, and various things, you know."

"I want to get away." He was sullen and ashamed.

I saw his point.

"Bring me an order from Solomon and I will let you have any money you want," I said.

"Damn Solomon. You know he won't do that."

"I must get his order," I said.

He rose and turned out the lamp. Then the door clicked to behind him.

PUSEY was sulky at breakfast.

"There are two or three thousand letters," he said.

"What are you going to do with them?"

"I've told Mrs. Jones to burn them."

"Is that wise?" I asked.

"No," he snapped, "but they'll burn all the same."

Soon after breakfast I was surprised to see a small car drive up. I went to the door. It was Inspector Mac, with his bowler and rolled umbrella, complete. Once more I sensed that vague lack of definition about him, the compromise between stockholder and head clerk. The nose looked more solid than ever in his sharp, ironic face. The only difference was that he had lost his air of simplicity adrift. He looked grimmer, more taut than I remembered him.

"Want to see you," he said, in his staccato manner. "Come this way then." I led him into the drawing-room and we sat down in front of the fire. I offered him a cigarette. He refused it and produced a notebook from his breast pocket.

"What's the matter, Mac?"

"Come about that Orchard Slasher and Martle, the lorry driver, you remember?"

"I thought you had filed those cases now. Surely you are not still investigating?"

"Never finished, an unsolved case," said Mac. "Now we know who did them."

"Oh!" I tried to make that both careless and sceptical.

"Remember that van load of rats, and the driver running away? Your little men."

"Nonsense," I said sharply.

"Driver ran with a limp. Not hurt, *fat*. Mr. Pusey."

"Oh, rot, Mac."

"One of 'em got left and made for home. Had a razor and did both."

"But how the devil could he have got there?"

He looked at me and then turned to the fire.

"In your car. You were at the waterworks the night before."

"Says you!" But I was getting nervous.

"Don't you know about it?"

"No."

"He was in your car."

"No. Besides, if I had known and he had done it, would I have been such a fool as to take the body to the station?"

"Bluff," said Mac.

"Rot," said I.

"Who was the man you went away with in the Ford?"

"Pusey," I said.

"How had he got on to you?"

"He read my name in the papers, about the Orchard murder."

"Thought it was his man's work, eh?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know why he came to see you?"

"He came about the colony, wanted help. He had seen that I was a reporter."

"There are plenty of reporters, why you?"

"Ask him," I snapped.

"I will." He nodded gravely. "About that Basuto stone."

"Me again, I suppose!"

"You were in town. Could only have been done by your little men. Impossible otherwise."

"Are you going to put down every unsolved crime to them, Mac?"

"The Basuto stone, yes."

"I was in town," I said slowly, "but on the night it was stolen I was in all evening. Ask the Irish girl in the house."

"Got a soft spot for you," said Mac. "Unreliable."

"First I've heard of it."

"That fellow Gilroy, you were with him. He's in funds, splashing the town. Smart, that."

"I wrote an article about receiving for him."

"Smart work, Swan, but it won't wash. Listen, Pusey took his last penny out of the bank a week before you came to town. You had closed your account. What you been living on since?"

"I haven't paid for anything, you know. That was Pusey's business."

"All you got to do," said Mac slowly, "is tell us everything. You'll get the benefit of the doubt about the orchard murder, and I'll see you don't get more than short time for the stone."

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"Nice of you, Mac, but I know nothing about them."

"Nothing?"

"Not a thing."

"You better think that over, Swan."

"I have," I said, and he looked at me darkly.

"Bring in Pusey."

I fetched Pusey and told him to deny everything.

"Pusey?" asked Mac.

"Mr. Pusey. Yes."

"About that van you stole from Chester. . . ."

"What van?" asked Pusey patiently.

"He thinks you stole a van and took a number of the little men up to town and crashed them near some waterworks," I explained.

"That is very interesting," sneered Pusey, but he looked yellow.

"Deny all that?" Mac snapped.

Pusey jumped to his feet, his face purpling.

"What the hell are you talking about, man?"

"Look here you two, you better come clean," said Mac.

Pusey, who was standing by the fire, bent down and threw a shovelful of coal on the fire as if he were throwing it at Mac's head.

"Damn you," he said, "damn you."

"Shut up, Pusey, he is only doing his duty."

"Stern daughter of the voice of God," Pusey quoted, grimacing like a monkey.

"It's no good, Mac," I said, "there's nothing to be got out of us. We know nothing."

"All right." Mac put away his notebook and got up. "I'll have the case against you fellows ready in about a week." With that he turned to go.

"Have a drink before you go," I suggested.

He did not turn round, but walked to the door. Half way there he halted with an exclamation of surprise. Solomon was standing in the doorway.

"Will you tell me who this angry man is?" asked Solomon.

I stepped forward.

"Inspector Mac, from Scotland Yard."

"He has come about the two murders, I suppose?"

"Yes," I said.

SOLOMON walked rapidly towards the fire and climbed up to his favorite seat on the mantelpiece. Mac watched him with wide-open eyes.

"Sit down, Inspector."

Mac took his old seat again, without a word.

"I know the truth about this matter," said Solomon slowly. "One of my men got hold of a razor and disappeared. It was wilful disobedience on his part. For a week we heard nothing of him, and then the two men were discovered dead. Mr. Swan found one of them. It was his misfortune, as it seems. The man came back soon after the second murder and confessed to me."

"Was he the man missing from the expedition to London?" asked Mac quickly.

"I know of no expedition to London," replied Solomon.

He was lying. He had known of Pusey's venture and given his permission. But he was doing it to help Pusey.

"Want to see this man," said Mac briskly.

"You cannot," said Solomon.

Again I felt that light flitter of excitement around the brows. The game was getting dangerous.

"I am a police officer," said Mac. "Please produce this man for me. Want to question him."

"Will you try him before twelve good men and true and hang him by the neck until he is dead, Mac?" I tried to imagine Napoleon in the dock, and couldn't.

"Not for me to say," said Mac solidly.

"I cannot produce this man," Solomon spoke.

"Why not?" Mac was sharp and dictatorial.

"Because he is already in the hands of the police. He is dead."

I saw the game and grinned. It was all going to be put down to Bolivar, and Bolivar was in the Home Office somewhere, pickled in alcohol. Solomon could play our game as well as any human.

"You mean the one that was shot?" asked Mac.

It was a blow to him.

"Yes. He has paid the price."

Solomon brought out this pious epitaph as naturally as a Sunday newspaper, though I knew that our system of sin and retribution was quite alien to him.

"Is that enough?" asked Pusey roughly.

"I will report it," said Mac cautiously. "Now about this Basuto stone."

"I read about the theft in the newspapers," said Solomon, "but know nothing whatsoever about it."

And with that he did his climbing down trick from the mantelpiece and

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The thoughts of the little figure on the plate were far removed from the multitude—in a world they could never share or fathom.

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walked out through the door. We all watched him go.

"What do you think of them, Mac?"

"I'll discuss that with you some other day, Swan," he replied stiffly.

I spent the rest of the morning seeing the film men and the missionary. The film men shot the house, got me to say a few words, and managed to catch a scowl from Pusey. When Mrs. Jones heard they were there she got into her Sunday best and posed seraphically, with Napoleon wriggling in her arms, a pretty picture of mother love. The Minimum Men were more difficult. They had had enough of photographers, but I managed to get a few of them to walk across the lawn. It was not very satisfactory. Finally, I persuaded Mary to talk to them about the hospital. The effect was spoilt, I thought, by her excessive use of technical terms. A popular audience would not care for that.

The missionary, a thin, scraggy-necked woman with a pince-nez and an apologetic whisper which turned all life into a confidential innuendo, was not easy. She whispered proprietorial asides about God, mentioned redemption as if it were a new germicide, and then, with an eager, virgin, soulful, expectant eye asked to see "the dear creatures." I warned her that they had no religion in the accepted sense of the word, and her face lit up with zestful expectation. That, one could have sworn, was what she had hoped. The Indians in the Gran Chaco had been like that when she had worked amongst them.

I dragged Napoleon in by the scruff of his neck, and caught a young woman I did not know from Eve. They were scantily clothed, as usual. The missionary twittered in her chair, smiled nervously, and adjusted her pince-nez to look at them.

Both the girl and Napoleon wriggled away and left at once.

"Poor, poor children," the lady whispered. Then something about a "field, a wonderful field." Finally she left, leaving a tract in my hands.

I found Pusey in the drawing-room reading the newspapers. I, too, picked them up one by one and glanced hurriedly through.

Anyone who cares can turn back to the files and study the manner in which Jellaby's Press presented the interview with Solomon. It is a fruitful study in the methods then current. Two papers only had given the interview in full. Some had suppressed this, some that. One had apocryphal additions, and one had rewritten the whole of it in a highly sensational way. Emphasis had been given, according to taste, to this or that by indenting, by blacking up, by heads and cross heads. It was difficult to believe that this immense variety had been possible with the one original text.

On the whole the papers dealt with the affair lightly. A circus had come to town! But three things had stuck in the gullets of the more popular press, Solomon's Eugenic programme,—"Ritual Murder in Welsh Hills" was one cross head, "Not Men, But Animals,"—and Solomon's claim to equality,—The Isle of Wight is Ours!" screamed one paper in mock alarm. Most of the editorials played a jet of sub-acid prejudice and racial hatred lightly on one or other of these themes. No cardinal event of our own time has been so foolishly misrepresented. Not one newspaper in the land realised that something had happened which was to change the shape of things for ever.

"What do you think of it?" I asked Pusey.

"There's a storm blowing up," he said. "You can read between the lines, can't you?"

"Yes," I admitted. "They don't know what to think about it, yet. But by tomorrow morning they will have clarified an attitude. I don't think it is going to be sympathetic."

"Do you think Jellaby will intervene?" he asked.

"Bound to, I should think."

"THE whole damn thing has been mismanaged," said Pusey. "I wash my hands of it. I was always for increasing the colony and lying low until the time came. With ten to twelve thousand of them, just think of what could be done! But there you are, they wouldn't listen to *me*. And now that fellow Solomon is challenging the world with two hundred and fifty. Ridiculous!"

"Perhaps it is as well there are only two hundred and fifty," I suggested. "Even with twelve thousand a war against society would have been useless. I hardly think Solomon will care to throw his handful into battle. He must try and get what he wants peacefully."

"Not a bit of it," fumed Pusey. "Look here, he has no conception of what the country is like. He has a profound contempt for us. I don't blame him for that, but his judgment is at fault. He has never seen society on the hunt, watched policemen in action, or an army, for the matter

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of that. He's just a fanatic with a grossly over-rated idea of his powers. They'll be wiped out in half an hour."

"That would be a tragedy."

"But you won't be able to blame us if we do just that. Solomon's attitude is intolerable. He is challenging us."

"Yes, I know. But. . . ."

I do not know what I was going to say. Solomon came in quietly and asked me to go to the library. On the table a map of England and Wales lay open.

"It might be necessary to leave this place," he said. "I want to consult you about other possible hiding places."

"You could hide almost anywhere," I said. "All you need is a wood. You will always be able to live on the land."

"I want a place not far from London."

"How far?"

"Say fifty miles."

I looked at the map and pondered.

"There's Epping Forest, just to the north. There are plenty of trees, with open glades and heathland."

"But that would be obvious, would it not, if they were looking for us?"

"I suppose they would search Epping," I agreed. "How about the South Down, unless they are too far?"

I pointed out to him where they were.

"What are they like?" he asked.

"Open hills, with broad, curving backs, and covered here and there with low scrub, mostly yew trees, oak, ash, thorn and hornbeam. There are any number of rabbit holes where you could hide."

"And farms?"

"You could raid the valley. Look, suppose you hid here, south of Harting, between the Beacon and Telegraph House. There is plenty of shrub and woodland there. It would be difficult to surprise you. There are wide views all round. And you could scour the valley for food stuffs, turnips or whatever it is you live on during the winter."

"I will think about it," he said.

When I got back to Pusey it was to find him warming his hands before the fire, with a scared look on his great fat face. A spruce young man with bold eyes and of a ram-like beauty was talking to him. He had not taken off his coat, perhaps because Pusey had not asked him to. On the table I saw a pair of motoring gloves and field glasses.

"Here's Swan," said Pusey. Then he turned to me. "Major Pethwick, Mr. Jellaby's private secretary."

"How do you do," I said, but I was scared stiff. Such was the power of Jellaby's name. I smiled nervously, ingratiatingly. Pusey was smiling, too, for all the funk in his eyes.

I took an instant dislike to the man. I didn't like his beauty; his bold, assertive manner, didn't like the sleek curve of hair above the brow, nor his ruckled forehead and smiling condescension. But I was too afraid to show my dislike.

"A registered journalist?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes," I said.

"Still?" he asked, gimleting me with his eyes.

"I believe so. I was dismissed some time ago, but I am on the register."

"We shall have to look into that." He made a note in a small red book, snapped the elastic round it, and pocketed it. I damned him in my heart.

"I have come to fetch a dozen of the men," he went on, surveying us calmly. "My car is outside."

"Yes, I see," I said helplessly.

"Order twelve of them to come here," he told me, and I got to my feet. But before I went he raised a hand and stopped me.

"Look at this."

He pulled something out of his waistcoat pocket and handed it over.

My heart missed a beat. It was one of our tubes.

"What is it?" I asked, my ears burning.

"An interesting thing," he remarked casually, and snapped his fingers. I handed it back. "Look." He shook it out and it unfolded. He put his hand in a waistcoat pocket and drew out a dart.

"They are like the tubes used by Indians in the Amazon basin," said Pusey, looking at me with scared eyes, his face yellow.

Pethwick nodded, put the dart into the tube and blew lightly. The dart stuck into the wood of the mantel-piece. I stared, saying nothing.

"Where . . . where did you get that?" asked Pusey.

"A member of the party got it at Birmingham. They turn them out there for the South American trade. He sent it along as a curiosity. You never know what will come in useful."

"No," Pusey and I agreed together.

"Has it anything to do with our men?" asked Pusey, his face more yellow than ever.

Pethwick did not reply. To this day I do not know whether he suspected our

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men were armed with the tubes. On the whole I do not believe he did. He certainly did not know they had their poison prepared. The tube had come into his possession in the way he said. Jellaby had his spies in all the factories. Probably the party member who sent it did not know where the consignment had been sent. I do not know to this day why Pethwick showed it to us. Out of vanity, no doubt. But I am tolerably sure that Jellaby had already seen in the tube an admirable way of arming Minimum Man.

"Fetch them," Pethwick ordered me, crossed his legs, and yawned.

"You . . . you had better tell Solomon," said Pusey. There was some desperate warning in his eyes.

CHAPTER NINE

SOLOMON was in the library. With him were most of the colony. They were standing ten deep before a map of England which had been pinned low on the wall. Solomon stood near the map, pointing with a pencil. He was no doubt instructing them about their future home, if it became necessary to leave the present one.

I felt like Gulliver amongst the Lilliputians.

"May I speak to you, Solomon?" I said.

"It is not very convenient," he said, frowning a little. "Open your mind to me. I shall read your thought."

This was the first time I had consciously tried to do this. I conjured a composite, mixed picture into my mind of Pethwick talking, of what Pethwick had said, of Pethwick's relationship with Jellaby, and of all that that implied. I did not think clearly or consecutively about these things. I allowed my mind to brush over them rapidly. Perhaps it took five seconds in all for the field to be covered.

There was a slight stir amongst the crowd, and I realised that all of them had been reading my thoughts. Solomon nodded, and the whole company filed out of the room.

"Where have they gone to?" I asked.

"They have taken up their positions. Go back and tell him that I refuse to let him have any of the men."

"For God's sake, Solomon, be careful. If you refuse to give them up, he and his thugs will take them."

"Do you think I should give them up, then?"

"No, you can't do that, but you should not resist either. Order your people to the woods. They will never be able to find them there."

"When he goes, lock the doors and shut the lower windows. My men are on the parapet now, and they are armed. If they try to take the men by force we shall have to kill. I have ordered them to shoot."

I stumbled out into the hall and collided with Pusey.

"He tells you to hurry up," said Pusey.

I went on into the dining-room. He turned his head sharply when I went in.

"What the hell does this wait mean?" he spluttered angrily.

"I am sorry, but . . . Solomon regrets that he is not able to give you any men."

"What!" There was an ugly, vindictive snarl about the lips. He sprang to his feet. "You are in charge of this colony."

"No. Solomon is."

"To hell with Solomon. You'll live to regret this." And with that he stumped out of the room. I followed him, shut the door and locked it. Then I rushed from room to room to see that all the windows were closed. From one of them I saw Pethwick talking to three men standing by the car in the drive.

I went back into the hall and met Pusey.

"Come along" I shouted, and raced up the stairs to my bedroom. I threw the window up and looked down towards the porch. A moment later I could hear Pusey panting at my side.

"Hello!" I shouted.

Three men backed out of the porch and looked up at us. Their car was on the far side of the drive, in front of the door.

One of the men whispered something I could not hear and Pethwick also stepped out from the porch.

"Bring them out," he shouted.

Pusey and I did not move.

Pethwick laughed, and turned to the three men.

"Break a window and get in," he ordered them.

"For God's sake, don't. They are armed," I yelled.

"So are we," he said, and pulled out a revolver. I looked at the three men. They, too, had revolvers, and were walking towards the drawing-room window.

"Look out," I shouted, "there are men on the parapet."

I heard the loud crash of glass. The drawing-room window had been broken.

Pethwick threw a glance in that direction, and then up towards the parapet. He must have seen something, for he swung up

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the revolver and fired. Something came hurtling down past the window, fell with a loud thwack on the tiles of the portico and rebounded to the ground. I looked down, horrified. It was a woman, and she was obviously dead. A stain of blood coloured the gravel.

"Murderer!" I screamed. There was something inexpressibly shocking in that tiny woman flattened on the path.

Pethwick looked up, his face white, his teeth grinning. He gave a cry and clapped a hand to his face, reeling away. At the same moment I heard a shout from the window. A man came tumbling out. There was another cry, and the third man streaked away, veering from side to side, running rapidly.

"Good God, Pusey," I said. "They've got three of them."

"Here, let me see," he shouted. "Blast you, get out of the way."

Pusey pulled me from the window and leant out. Over his shoulder I saw the running man duck behind a tree about forty yards away.

"What's happening?" I shouted, and tugged at his coat.

"Look for yourself," said Pusey, and backed out of the window. His face was flabby and quivering.

I leant out. Pethwick had collapsed and was lying on the grass, just beyond the car, face down, one knee drawn up and his arms thrown out helplessly. One of his fists was clenched on the revolver.

I LOOKED around for the other two. One of them had reached the car and was doubled over the door, hanging limp as an empty sack, both his arms dangling down. The other had reached the corner. I could only see his heels. The body was out of sight.

"He shot first," I said to Pusey.

"What the hell does that matter?" he said. "Do you think they are all dead?"

"We must go down and see," I said.

"Wait. Don't forget that the other fellow has a revolver. Where is he?"

"Hiding behind the tree, I think."

Yes, he was still there. I saw a segment of his face flash into sight and withdraw.

"Pethwick," he shouted. "Pethwick."

I cupped my hands round my mouth.

"He's dead. Run, man, run."

He must have heard me. The next second he broke into the open, running for dear life. Once he half stumbled round and fired. In a very short time he was under cover of the wood.

"Come along," I said.

I ran downstairs and to the hall. Mrs. Jones was in there leaning against the wall, both her hands pressed to her heart. I had not time to speak to her, but unbarred the door and ran out.

Nothing could be done for them. They were dead. Pethwick's face was contorted, his eyes fixed in a wide stare, the upper lip retracted from the teeth.

"Pusey," I called.

He came out of the house.

Mrs. Jones peeped timorously from the porch.

"What shall we do with them?" I asked, helplessly.

"Put them in the car," said Pusey.

I did not see the use of that, but anything was better than the sight of them lying, separately, about the grass and the gravel. We laid the three of them out in the back of the car.

Mrs. Jones began sobbing loudly. I looked round. She was on her knees in the gravel, the little woman dead in front of her.

"What shall we do with her?" asked Pusey.

"Solomon will deal with that."

I looked up at the parapet. None of the little people was in sight.

"Solomon!" Pusey shouted. "Hey, Solomon!"

There was no answer.

"My God!" said Pusey. "I hope they haven't disappeared and left us to this."

"We're surrounded by now. They would not be able to get through the cordon."

"How long do you give the police?" Pusey asked.

"Half an hour at the most. That fellow was running hard. He will tell them that they were deliberately attacked."

"We've got the little woman to show," said Pusey. "Blast that swine Pethwick," he added.

"He will say that Pethwick shot in self-defence."

"What shall we do?" asked Pusey. "We've got to do *something*."

"Solomon!" I shouted. But there was no answer.

"Look for them, Pusey."

Mrs. Jones had picked up the dead girl and carried her indoors in her arms. Pusey and I followed.

"Let's look in the drawing-room," said Pusey.

We opened the drawing-room door. They were there, grouped round the map. Solomon was busy with his pencil.

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I recognized some of them, Lucilla, with her burnt face and chest, Napoleon, standing stiff and very upright, Mary, slimly elegant, Lavoisier and Priestley, standing together, and Tamerlaine, with his flat, broad nose. Some of the others were familiar. I thought I recognised Aesculapius amongst them, but I could not be sure.

"What is it?" asked Solomon.

"They are dead," said Pusey solemnly.

"I thought it would work," said Lavoisier.

"What are we to do now?" I asked. "The fourth man escaped."

"Did you collect the darts?" asked Napoleon.

"No," I said.

"We shall want the darts," he said, and slipped out of the door.

"It was a mistake to let the fourth man escape," said Solomon.

"He will go to the police," said Pusey. "They will be here arresting the whole lot of you in half an hour."

"We shall wait for them," said Solomon.

"Escape, Solomon," I said. "Take them all away."

"But if we are surrounded?"

"You could leave the house now and slip through them when it is dark."

"If they came here and found we were gone," argued Solomon, "they would immediately close in the cordon and look for us. No, we would be at their mercy. We must wait for night."

"For heaven's sake give orders to your men not to fire on them," said Pusey.

"We shall not fire on them if they are reasonable," replied Solomon. "If they attempt to capture us, we shall have to defend ourselves. We must gain time until it is dark."

"Bluff them," I advised. "Bluff them for all you're worth."

"I shall leave you to talk with them. You had better go now and wait for them. Time is short and I have much instruction to give."

Pusey and I left the room. Pusey went back to the dining-room fire. I wandered outside and waited, pacing to and fro between the car with its dead and the bare, stripped trees of the wood. I was certain then that the little people were to be extinguished. Minimum Man would cease to exist, probably, within the next twenty-four hours. Nature's mutation would be strangled almost at birth. And humanity would go on as always, bickering and wrangling and muddling in a manner still half savage, and almost wholly irresponsible.

MINIMUM MAN had captured my imagination. Almost in despite of myself I had been impressed by the power which lay in them. Fifteen years of my life had been spent in recording the deeds and utterances of my fellow men, and it had turned me sick. I was not cynical by nature. Doubt had been forced upon me by the universal inanity. My nose had been held down to the mess, and my eyes had been riveted to the futility for fifteen years.

It is a long time. Something about Minimum Man had recaptured for me the simplicities and the ardours of my pre-reporting days, when the world was a world of brave men and brave women intent upon an adventure. I was one of those young people suckled in Wellsian history, and brutally disenchanted by the shape of things as they are.

I grieved over the fate of Minimum Man. It was, to me, a personal disaster. There they were, within that house, the seeds of a hopeful experiment in living and thinking, but surrounded now, I had no doubt, by hundreds of men in blue, penned in for the slaughter. Nothing could save them. Nothing. My species would have no mercy upon them. They had no use for them. I speculated grimly on the rôle allotted them by the party which would no doubt rule these islands for the next few hundred years. Espionage, and assassination, probably! Not any other political party would be more enlightened. Fascist, labour, communist, how could pure reason be harnessed to their service? It was hopeless.

I heard a shout from the wood, and turned round. It was a police sergeant. I motioned him to come forward.

He came slowly, grudgingly, looking to left and right, and stopped a few paces away. I recognised the honest, red face as that of the sergeant who had come to see me about our visitors.

"What is it, Sergeant?" I asked.

He cleared his throat.

"A man has reported that he and three companions visited you in a car this afternoon, and that your people have killed them."

"You knew it was Pethwick and his men," I said sharply.

"The Chief said they were to pass through."

"I thought so. They are all dead, now, in the motor car."

"Dead? Are you sure? Then you must all come with me to the police vans waiting beyond the wood."

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I took a few steps and held him by the arm.

"Listen, Sergeant," I whispered. "Mr. Pusey and I have no control over them. They are armed with tubes and darts which will kill within fifteen seconds. We are prisoners here, and dare not move. They are watching us now. Tell the Chief that I do not advise an attack today. He is bound to lose a number of men. Tell him to wait until the morning. I will do all I can to get them to go with you quietly then. They are in a nasty temper now."

"Why is that?" asked the sergeant.

"Pethwick shot one of their women. That is how it started. They would not have fired themselves if Pethwick had not killed one of them."

The sergeant looked at me suspiciously.

"But the man says they fired first."

"He is lying. I saw it all."

The sergeant was not convinced.

"I was to warn you that it is no use trying to escape," said the sergeant gruffly.

"I wish I could," I said. "I told you I was a prisoner here."

"I think the Chief meant the little fellows."

"I can't stop them from escaping," I said. "Tell the Chief that I cannot hold myself responsible. I have no power at all over them."

I tried to sound frightened and anxious. It succeeded, I think.

"They can't escape," whispered the sergeant hoarsely. "They've called up fresh reinforcements, and the Fusiliers will be here from Wrexham before dark. They haven't an earthly."

"That's good, but don't try and get them to-night, Sergeant. They'll fight to the last man. I'll see what I can do for you in the morning."

"I'll tell the Chief."

We had been whispering. I hoped that a whisper would carry more conviction. Now I talked aloud.

"Can you drive a car, Sergeant?"

"I used to be in the motor patrol," he said.

"Then you can drive that car away. I wouldn't look in the back. It is not a pleasant sight. There is nothing more, is there?" I added in a whisper.

"No."

"Away you go then."

But he was not able to resist the temptation to look in the back. What he had seen was plainly reflected in his honest face as he drove away.

I hoped I had bluffed the sergeant. With luck there would be no attack that evening and Solomon would get away with his people in the darkness. I hoped, too, that I had been able to whitewash a little my association with them. I felt pleased with my lie about being held prisoner. It automatically betrayed a desire to leave them and gave me the sympathy of those who were against the little men. That meant most people by now, I suspected. A cold, nippy wind was rising. I shivered and went to report what had happened, to Solomon. He was alone in the library, and merely nodded.

I WENT to my room. As I entered the door a drawer was pushed home quickly. Pusey was standing by the chest of drawers, a look of confused guilt on his face.

"I do not keep the money there," I said.

He hesitated painfully, rubbing his chin and casting quick glances at me.

"So you are going?" I said.

"Yes."

"Ratting, leaving us in the lurch."

"I cannot help by staying here," he mumbled. "It's no use, man. Let us go whilst the going is good."

"Funk?" I enquired nastily.

"Yes, funk if you like." He had raised his voice now, and was more sure of himself. "You know Jellaby and his crowd. *He* won't forgive the death of his jackal. Tomorrow they'll slaughter the lot of us. Do you remember those colliers in South Wales?"

"Yes."

"That's the man you're to deal with. He won't lose any more men by attacking. It will be gas again. Gas, and what then?"

"I don't believe it," I said.

"You must cut and run, Swan. You'll be caught like a rat in a trap."

"And Mrs. Jones?"

"I have asked her."

"And she said?"

"She is staying."

"So am I. Hell, Pusey, it is not such a pleasant world outside that ring of policemen."

"Swan, for God's sake give me some money. Seven thousand of it is mine by right."

I looked at him. It was a new aspect of Pusey. There were fears and turbulences written on his face. The fat, comfortable liver was shying away and wincing at the thought of concentration camps, eating perhaps, food that would strip his gross

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envelope and leave him an echo in flapping clothes. His had been a comfortable, regardless life, and already he felt the shovel in his hands and the hard truckle bed in his great soft whale back. He was going whilst the going was good.

I went over to the corner of the bedroom and lifted a board. The money was wrapped in newspaper. I gave the whole of it to him.

"And listen, Pusey, you have only to modify your reminiscences a little and there is another five thousand in it for you."

"Won't you come with me?" he asked.

Fear had so eaten into him that I knew he wanted me for company. He did not care any longer what happened to us. He was thinking only of his eighteen stone and how to salvage it.

"When are you going?" I asked.

"As soon as it is dark."

"It is that already."

I looked out of the window. The wood, a splotch of darkness, was lashing in the wind. All along the horizon there was a ring of fire.

"Look at that, Pusey."

He came to the window and stood by my side.

"They have lit up the lines," he said. "Solomon will never be able to get through."

"Goodbye and good luck," I said.

He groped for my hand and shook it hard.

"Put all the blame on me," I said.

"No, Swan, no. I am not that sort."

I left him then, and went down to see Solomon, but I could find him nowhere. Napoleon told me that he had gone out to inspect the lines. I wandered about for a while, and, passing through the hall, saw the main door close stealthily. That was Pusey, I knew.

I went back to the drawing-room. Several of them were there. Mary was sitting on the table, swinging her legs.

"Do you want to die, Mary?"

"No," she said, looking at me.

"Are you afraid of death?"

"No," she said again. "Are we going to die, then?"

"Perhaps."

"Solomon will find a way," she said happily.

"Where are your children?" I asked.

"My children?" She looked puzzled. I had forgotten that the identity of the mother with the child did not hold in the colony. To Mary her two children were no closer than any one of the two hundred and fifty. They were submerged in the crowd.

"What do you think is going to happen?" she asked.

"They will probably not attack tonight, but tomorrow morning they will. Perhaps they will use field guns and blow this place up. Pusey thinks they will use poison gas, and you have no defense against that."

"Mr. Pusey has left us," she said simply. "He went out of the house a few minutes ago and walked towards the policemen. He was deserting us. He had all the money, too."

"How do you know that?" I asked, startled.

"His mind was wide open," she explained. "He was spraying his thought through the whole house. Besides, some of our people out there saw him pass and sent back the message."

By telepathy, I remembered.

"They will not try to stop him, then?"

"Oh, no. Why should they?"

MRS. JONES had lit a fire in the library. I went over and warmed my hands. The wind was rattling in the windows.

I had been there perhaps a minute when Mary left the table and came over to me. She shinned up the chair and sat on my knee.

"Mr. Pusey has been killed," she said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"They shot him as he was walking towards them. I mean the policemen, not our men."

"Good God, is that true?"

"The message was sent back from Tamerlaine. There is a string of our people out there passing back the messages. Now," she went on dreamily, "the policemen are turning a beam of light upon him. He is lying in a heap in the grass. Three men walk forward. They have revolvers in their hands. They come forward cautiously. Two of them stop and the third man comes on. Now he is bending and looking at Mr. Pusey. He is turning him over. He shouts that he is dead. The two men walk forward. Now they lift him up with great difficulty, and stagger away back to their lines."

"Does all that come from Tamerlaine?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me more?"

"He is saying that there is a number of men behind the lights, and that it will be impossible to pass out that way. All the

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other scouts have sent the same message," she added.

"Are all the men policemen?" I asked, "or are there soldiers?"

"I will ask Tamerlaine and the others that."

She seemed to concentrate a moment, but almost immediately she said that there were soldiers amongst the policemen.

"All the scouts say there are soldiers," she said, "men in khaki with round tin hats on their heads and rifles in their hands."

She paused.

"Solomon has sent out a message recalling everybody to the house. They have all answered and are starting back."

"Tell me when Solomon comes back," I asked her.

"He is back now," said Mary. "He is in the drawing-room."

"Ask him if I may see him, please."

"He says, yes, will you go and see him."

I rose and went into the drawing-room. Solomon was climbing up to his favorite place on the mantelpiece.

"This is the last time I shall sit here," he said. There was almost a trace of regret in his voice.

I sat down.

"Solomon," I said, "for all I know you may have a plan of escape and may be able to lead your people out of this trap. If you have, I want to talk with you."

"I have," he said, "but we cannot take you and the Mother with us."

"We shall look after ourselves," I said lightly. "They will not treat us badly when they find us. I told the sergeant that we were held prisoners here against our will."

He nodded approvement to that.

"Do you trust me, Solomon?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Then you can tell me where you are going."

"We shall try to go to the place you suggested."

"One of these days, when I am free again, I may want to get in touch with you there. How shall I do it?"

"Go to the top of the Beacon at nightfall and flash a torch twice towards the south. I shall put a man to watch the hill each night."

"Thank you."

"Why do you think you will want to see us again?" he asked.

"England," I said, "is in the hands of her enemines. There must be men somewhere who are planning to deliver the country from Jellaby and his gang. I shall seek them out, but when I find them I want to know whether I can offer them your help."

"I am not concerned with human society," said Solomon.

"No, but this is in your own interest. If you escape from here you will be searched for high and low. Jellaby will not rest until he has killed the last of you. Your best hope is in an alliance with his enemies. If you can help them to overthrow the party of Freedom you will be able to ask your own price. There is a large number of people in England who would be grateful to you, and would see that the terms of the agreement were kept."

"How could we help them?"

"To begin with," I said slowly, "you could arrange for the assassination of Jellaby."

Solomon bent his head for some time.

"Your plan offers a way of escape from persecution," he said, at last. "I agree. Let me know when you are ready. Remember, two flashes at nightfall towards the south from the Beacon."

I rose then. It was foolish of me, no doubt, but I felt elated. My plan was no more than a dream, a vague sketch of action contingent upon their success in getting away. I did not think they could get away, and yet, I was elated. Death, which had closed in upon us, retreated to a distance. I called for dinner, loudly and cheerfully.

But there was no answer and I went to look for Mrs. Jones. She was sitting at the kitchen table, her head in her hands, weeping bitterly, and drunk.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Jones?" I asked.

"Poor Mr. Pusey," she sobbed. "Such a kind gentleman he was," and sobbed her heart out.

I COULD think of nothing to say to her. She was revelling in her grief as only a Welsh woman can. It was no use asking her for dinner. I patted her on the shoulder—a pat which let loose another flood of tears—collected the bread and butter, and a tin of salmon, and went into the dining-room. The blinds were drawn. I threw them apart, and sat down to my simple meal. They would no doubt be able to see me eating with their night glasses from the lines.

I had finished dinner when a little man came in.

"I am Aesculapius, the surgeon," he said.

"Good. How is the woman?"

"She has recovered from the operation.

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That is what I wanted to tell you, Swan."

"I congratulate you. You must feel proud. By the way, is she fit enough to escape with you tonight?"

"No," he said. "No, she is not."

"What are you going to do with her, then?"

"Will you come and see her? You will then be able to testify that she is on the way to recovery."

We went upstairs together to the room where I had seen the operation performed. The woman was lying on a pillow.

Possibly he said something to her. She got up and walked a few paces slowly. The man who had described the operation to me came in. He and Aesculapius looked at her.

"Are you going to leave her here tonight?" I asked.

"No," said Aesculapius. "She knows where we are going, and they would torture her, perhaps, in order to find out. She cannot stay."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"She is going to die," he said calmly.

"Die. I thought you said she was recovering."

"She is going to kill herself, now."

The woman was back on the pillow. The other surgeon handed her a dart.

"Stop," I cried. "For God's sake . . ."

But it was too late. The woman pricked herself on the arm, and dropped the dart. The two surgeons stood by, gravely.

"What is happening?" I cried.

Aesculapius held up a hand. The woman closed her eyes and was dead.

"She was telling us her sensations," said Aesculapius. "Very curious indeed."

I stood there helpless, looking down at her. My legs were trembling.

"You had better go now," said Aesculapius. "We are going to do a post-mortem."

I stumbled blindly out of the room and went downstairs to the dining-room. I drank a bottle of beer by the fire and fell fast asleep in the chair to the stirring rhythms of the *The Men of Harlech* from the kitchen.

I woke with a start and looked at the clock. It was one o'clock in the morning.

"Mr. Swan," said a voice. "Mr. Swan."

"Yes."

"We are going now. Most of us have gone already."

I looked towards the door. It was Napoleon, and he had his wings on. Tied to a belt round his waist was the tube, a quiver of darts, and a small red case—a lip-stick case—of curare.

"Flying away, are you?" I asked, my heart leaping.

"Yes."

"Wait. I shall see you off."

I turned out the light and walked up the stairs with Napoleon. The attics were in darkness. Napoleon climbed out of a window and stood on the parapet. There were about a dozen others there.

I put my head out of the window. It was bitterly cold and the wind whistled in my ears.

"Has Solomon gone?" I asked.

"No. Here I am."

They climbed up on the parapet from the gutter and stood in a row, their wings folded and their bodies doubled against the gale. Almost as one the wings were thrown wide and they shot up into the darkness.

"Good luck!" I cried, but they were gone.

I went downstairs and looked for a torch.

A quarter of an hour after the last of the little men had flown away, I went up to the attic window and started morsing G . . O . . N . . E, G . . O . . N . . E, with the torch. I did that for a few minutes and then went downstairs and turned the light on in the dining-room.

The minutes passed slowly. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. I wondered if they were ever coming. But they were very cautious. It was a full half hour later before I heard a light rap on the window. A face was pressed against the glass.

I walked over to the window and threw it up. A Tommy pushed a rifle in my chest and shouted, "Hands up."

A sergeant came pushing along and took charge.

"Who sent that signal?" he asked roughly.

"I did. They are all gone, the little people, I mean. There's only Mrs. Jones and myself left."

"What do you mean, gone?"

"Flown away. They left half an hour ago, just before I signalled you."

"That's a fine story, that is," but he was not sure of himself. "Where's the other fellow?"

"Pusey? He left at nightfall." Then I had an inspiration. "To warn you people they were going to fly away," I added.

The sergeant swore softly. I would not care to be in the shoes of the man who killed Pusey. He was in for it.

"Where's this woman?" he asked.

"In her bedroom, probably."

"Get inside, you fellows. Search the house from top to bottom, and keep your eyes skinned. Shoot on sight, if you see

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one of 'em. Edwards, you stay here. I want you."

THE men filed off left for the main door. The sergeant took out his notebook, scribbled a message, tore out the leaf, and handed it to Edwards.

"Look sharp," he commanded. "Here, let me time that message. There's going to be one hell of a row about this."

When Edwards had gone the sergeant told me to back to the fireplace. With his revolver in his hand, and his eye on me, he climbed over the sill and into the room.

"Can I put them down now?" I asked.

The sergeant ran a hand over my pockets and nodded.

Edwards came back with more men. Then the door opened and a colonel walked in, purple nosed, with small, screwed-up eyes, and a pair of fierce moustaches. It was very like a caricature. The sergeant jumped to his feet and saluted. I stood at attention, more or less.

"What's this, eh? What's this about flying, Sergeant?"

"He says they flew away, sir," barked the sergeant. "The men are searching the house."

"Nonsense. Damned nonsense, what! what!" spluttered the colonel. "Now then, you, the truth."

He looked savagely at me, twirling his moustache with a gloved hand.

"They had wings, sir, tied to their bodies, and could fly. We sent a man out at nightfall to warn you. Did he see you, sir?"

The colonel's face purpled a shade.

"Arrest the man who shot him when we get back, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Now then, when did they get away, what?"

"Three quarters of an hour ago, sir. I signalled the moment they were gone."

"What! What! Nonsense. They could not fly in this wind, eh? eh?"

"They did, sir."

"Couldn't you stop them, what?"

"No, sir. They threatened me."

"Sergeant, see what is happening to your men."

The sergeant clicked his heels, saluted, and left the room.

An orderly entered the room and handed a message to the colonel. He read it attentively and looked at me once or twice.

"Call the sergeant," he barked.

The sergeant came tumbling in through the door.

"They found nobody, sir, save the woman."

"Woman? Woman? She does not matter. Take four of your men and escort Mr. Swan back to headquarters."

"Yes, sir."

The sergeant motioned to me and we left the room together. Outside, he called for four men. Two of them marched with arms shouldered in front of me, two behind, and the sergeant in the rear. Not a word was said the whole way. We walked through the lines and the fires, and down a narrow lane for a mile until we came to a farmhouse. We entered the yard and the sergeant led us into the house. A

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young staff officer came out of a room and looked at me. Then he closed the door behind him.

The door opened again and a man in Air Force flying kit came out.

"Get him an overcoat, Sergeant," he commanded.

The sergeant saluted and went out of the house. He was not gone a minute before he was back with an officer's British warm. I put it on.

"This way," said the man, turning from the door. "No, you fellows need not come."

I followed him out of the yard, and we walked down the lane.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To the bus. I am flying you back to town."

"What for?" I asked.

"Don't know."

The lane flattened out as it approached the sea and we turned through a gate on the right and into a field. The aeroplane was by the hedge, facing the wind.

I climbed into the observer's seat. The engine roared, we bumped across the field and rose into the air, the wheels spinning.

I REMEMBER little of that journey through the air. It did not take long. Mostly it was above the clouds. Now and again a cluster of lights sparkled out below. I was very tired and sleepy. In a very short time, as it seemed to me, we were descending into London's orange glow. I recognized the long line of lights along Oxford Street and immediately afterwards landed in that part of Hyde Park Jellaby had reserved for his own service planes.

A closed car was waiting for us. We turned out of the park at Hyde Park Corner, tore down Constitution Hill, along the Mall, away to the right across the Horse Guards Parade, and came to a halt at the entrance to Downing Street. Two policemen were waiting there. They took me in charge and led me to Number Ten.

The door of Number Ten was opened. A black shirted bodyguard took me over from the police, shut the door, and led me to a room.

"Wait here," he said, and disappeared.

I knew then that I was to meet Jellaby himself. There could be no other reason for this.

"This way," said the blackshirt, and I followed him down a passage into a brightly lit room. The bodyguard saluted, snapped round and was gone. I was left face to face with Jellaby.

He was sitting at a desk, bent over some papers. He did not look up immediately and I had time to study him. There was a silver ring of baldness on the crown of his head, and the grey hair was thinning at the temples. His face was quite unlike the photographs of him spattered about the country. It was quieter, less tense, and the eyes, as I saw later, were milder and more opaque.

There was an air of pondering simplicity, of stupidity, almost. There were three tiers of pouches under the slightly protruding eyes. The nose, thin and lean at the base, broadened out to the extravagantly wide nostrils. And the mouth was a perfect cupid's bow. A rich and sensuous mouth, I thought. Of cunning, there was no inkling. It was Jellaby who finally convinced me that the human face is the poorest possible index of the mind within.

For this was the man who had engineered the silent revolution, gassed the stay down miners at a pit in South Wales, consigned his enemies—and some of his friends—to the concentration camps. There was no sign of the artist's sensitivity, the woman's intuition, and the devil's own patience which characterized him.

He laid down the papers with the soft sigh of a tired housewife done with her accounts, and looked up. Then he motioned me to sit down, turning the reading lamp until it glared directly into my eyes and left him in shadow.

"So they have escaped," he said, tapping his fingertips together. "Where have they gone to, Mr. Swan?"

"I was their prisoner, sir. They did not tell me anything."

There was an oppressive silence.

"What do you advise should be done with them?"

"I would wipe them out, sir," I said boldly.

"Oh, no, not that, surely. They seem to be very clever people."

"I would wipe them out, sir. They are dangerous and cannot be trusted."

I could not see him clearly. He was blurred behind the lamp. But I felt his eyes on me.

He yawned and stretched his hands above his head.

"You are not a member of the party, I take it?"

"No, sir."

"You know their habits, Mr. Swan, better than anyone else. I want you to find out where they are." I looked up quickly

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feigning as well as I could a zealous attention. "When you find them, let me know."

"I shall do my best, sir."

He bent over the papers again.

"From now on you will be an active member of the party," the voice went on. "If you wish to, that is." He yawned again, and drew his hands down his face.

"Yes, sir, I do."

I had to play the game boldly or not at all. Nothing could hinder me more in serving the little people than belonging to the party. It would make the task of getting in touch with the counter-revolutionaries, if there were any, doubly difficult.

"Then you take on this task?"

"I shall find them for you, sir."

"I want their help," he said soberly. "England has need of them today. Forget your prejudice against them. Find them, and I shall help them in every way I can."

There was an honest ring in his voice. I looked up with the appropriate doubt of one who did not agree. He stood up, and I rose hurriedly to my feet. Above the lamp was that mild, simple, almost stupid face.

"Sir," I said, with that overwhelmed and confused enthusiasm I had seen so many times in the bearing of people towards the great, "I shall find them."

"I am sure you will."

He had, no doubt, pressed a bell under the table, for at that moment the blackshirt came in again and I was led out. My one interview with Jellaby was over.

There are those who say that Jellaby was a stupid buffoon. He was all kinds of things, but he was not that. During the short time I was with him he had by making me a member of the party, obtained complete control of my actions; if I was a sympathizer with the little men he had reassured me; if I was the enemy I declared myself to be, he had given me an incentive for finding them. I must not think of myself and my hates, but of England. And England had need of the little men. To this day I cannot swear that he did not mean what he said. It is possible that Jellaby would have done for them all that he said he would do. It is also possible that he would have sent them one and all to the lethal chamber. No one knows. Perhaps he himself did not know, then.

That afternoon I was wakened up in Marchmont Street by a puffy young man, a chinless, arrogant dandy who smoothed his gloves continuously, and to whom I took an instant dislike.

"Report to me each morning at the Home office," he said, and dropped a card delicately on the table.

I saw that his name was Smythe, Alfred M.

CHAPTER TEN

FOR the next fortnight I played a game.

The flight of the little men was in all the morning papers, but not one of them mentioned the death of Pusey. Nor, may I say in passing, did I ever hear what became of the nine thousand pounds he was carrying when he was killed.

Secret orders were issued to search for and detain the men wherever they were found. Smythe told me that. I was given a salary—an astonishingly large salary—and a free travelling pass over the railways. For a forthnight I journey north, south, east and west, talked lordily with inspectors and chief constables, motored over wide belts of country, cross-examined keepers and road minders and village bobbies, all to no avail. I spent a pleasant week-end in the Lake District, another in Cornwall. And each evening I wrote my report for Smythe, very full reports. I have read them since. They convey an impression of feverish activity, and a complete lack of plan. But if moving around was an indication of zeal, then I was earning my salary and to spare.

I saw a great deal of England and met a vast variety of people. In the brief period of a few months England had changed beyond recognition. I had travelled much as a reporter, and could compare. In the pre-Revolution days I would have summed up my sense of England in two phrases which stood to me for the English character,—"That's how it is, old man," and "I don't care a cuss." But now, I found people had shut their mouths hard. They would say nothing. The reserve they had always prided themselves on and which rarely existed had descended upon them.

They were clams, and suspicious clams at that. Working men had taken to spitting in a curiously pointed manner when spoken to. The middle class agreed to everything you said with a long drawn and contemplative "Y..e..e..s" and had a habit of glancing at wrist watches and

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scuttling away. It was a new aspect of ir people for me.

And the cussedness had gone, too; .iat individual variation and stress to the point of ridicule of some personal trait or angle of thought. I had rarely been to a bar outside London without meeting there some man who stood out from his fellows as a "character"—a kinked grotesque of some kind. Many Englishmen that I knew persisted in outlining their sanity with some proud personal difference from the mob. Now all that, too, was gone. The Englishman was rolled out, uniform in an all-pervading flat unprofitableness. The salt and savour was gone away from him. He was a drab dud who talked of nothing but the weather, and dully about that.

I have a composite picture of men standing with beer mugs in their hands, staring in front of them; of low, quick under the brow glances; of women peering out of houses and popping in again; of lace curtains stirring beyond windows; of streets deserted at early hours; of apathetic salutes to commissioners flashing by in glittering cars; of queer, unreadable looks turned as they passed; and above all, of an immense silence and helpless isolation each from the other. It was as tragic as it was unexpected.

Once, when I was in a public-house at Spalding, a small, bowler-hatted clerk whose face was flushed with drink, crashed his glass on to the floor and shouted, "To hell with Jellaby." The bar emptied as if by magic. Men dropped their drinks and fought with each other at the door to get out. In a very short time I was alone with the man, now leaning tipsily against the bar.

I asked the barman to run for a policeman, and stood with my back to the door. The policeman must have been within a few yards of the entrance, for he quickly entered.

"This man," I nodded, "been shouting things."

"Shouting things," that was euphemism for cursing Jellaby. The policeman marched him out roughly, his hand to the youth's collar.

There was no alternative. I was a member of the party. I did not dare pass the incident over. To this day I do not know whether the fellow was a genuine hater of Jellaby or one of his spies.

And then, unexpectedly, I met Simley, at an hotel in Reading.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him. Simley had been a reporter on the suppressed *Daily Herald*. I had worked with him on several jobs. He was older than most of us bald as a coot, but with thick, overhanging eyebrows and grimly taut mouth.

"I am a commercial traveller now," he said. "Groceries."

"Good God!"

He said nothing to that. There was no one else in the room.

"And I am a member of the party," I said, looking at him.

"So I heard. Well, good luck to you."

He turned to his attaché case, opened it. I could see he did not want to talk any more.

"Simley, I am looking for those little men."

"Good luck to you," he mumbled again, tonelessly.

"Are you for the party, too?" I asked mockingly.

"Of course, who isn't?"

I went to the door and shut it.

"Simley, I want to speak to you."

"I am rather busy, if . . . if you don't mind."

It was a nasty experience to find Simley afraid of me.

"Hell, drop it. I won't give you away. Listen, I want you to do me a favor. You used to believe in Labour. You really cared. You still care. I want you to give me the name of one man who is organizing opposition."

"You dirty sneak," he hissed, closing his case with a bang. "I don't care a damn if you get me for this. You swine." He was white with rage.

"That's all I want to know," I said. "Simley, for Heaven's sake drop your dramatics. I want to help. I was with those little people. I helped get them away. Yes, I did. I stole the Basuto stone for them. I believe in them, man, and hate Jellaby as much as you do. Yes, like hell. You've got to give me the name of somebody I can trust. Listen, I know where they are, those people. I can reach them. And Solomon has agreed to help." I lowered my voice to a whisper. "He will assassinate Jellaby for you any time. Any time."

There was a light sweat on Simley's face, and his doubt was pitiful.

"There are two hundred and fifty of them, and they've got those deadly tubes, every man jack and every woman amongst them. They will clear away this muck for you, if you help them to."

"What are you talking about?" asked

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Simley. "Who wants to clear anything away?"

"All right," I said, and shrugged my shoulders.

"Where do you live?" asked Simley, after a while.

I told him my number in Marchmont Street. "Ring me up some time," I added.

"Perhaps when I am back in town," said Simley.

Another man came in then, and I had no further chance of speaking to him. Simley seemed to be avoiding me deliberately.

I WENT back to London to report my failure to Smythe. He smoothed his perfumed hair, nodded and yawned.

"I don't see that it matters much," he said. "Still, the Chief is anxious to find them. And you know what the Chief is," he added delicately.

"What do you suggest I do?" I asked.

"Carry on," he said, "carry on." And yawned again behind his hand.

It was then that I began on my search of Epping Forest. Epping suited me. I could spend the day there and be back in my room by night. It was important that I should get back each evening, for I felt sure that Simley would turn up sooner or later.

But it was not Simley who came after all. One evening when I returned, a man was waiting for me. The Irish girl told me he had been there an hour already, and I raced up the stairs three at a time.

When I entered he was fast asleep, his head slewed sideways against a cushion propped at the back of his head. The coal black hair was outlined sharply against the yellow of the cushion. He was about forty years of age, I judged, but his face was deeply lined and unutterably weary. His hands were splayed out on his knees, the gnarled, bitten hands of a worker.

I woke him by shaking his shoulder gently. His eyes opened and looked into mine. He sat up, master of himself.

"Simley told me about you," he said.

"I was waiting for him, or for someone from him."

"Are you followed?" he asked.

"I do not think so. They know where I live, of course. Did anyone see you come here?"

"No. Now tell me about the little people."

I told him what I knew, about Solomon's promise to me, and that I could find them if necessary.

"I have been working ever since the Revolution," he said gravely. "You will want to know my credentials. I was Secretary to the Iron Workers' Union. Now I am a garage hand in my own garage, but that is useful, for I can travel about the country. Up till now I felt there was no hope. Even now, I do not see what can be done."

"If you can get men and arms. . . ." I began.

"I can get the men, but the arms are difficult. Let me tell you now what has been done." He put one gnarled hand into the other and clasped it. The men, our men, have been pilfering what they could, but it is desperately slow. One spare part from this munition work, or another from that. In three months we have no more than fifteen machine guns and two or three hundred bombs all told. We have another fifty machine guns and about a thousand rifles hidden in Wales. They came from Ireland."

"That isn't much," I said.

"See how I trust you, a member of the party! That shows you how desperate we are. If you tell on us, nothing is lost. We have no chance as it is. You alone can give us effective help. If you fail us, we are lost. If you help us, there is a chance."

"I shall help you," I said. "What are your plans?"

"It will take another two, possibly three, years. There are no plans yet." He made a gesture of despair with his hands.

He spoke quickly, with a restrained energy. His bold eyes searched my face.

"When can you come again?" I asked.

"Tomorrow night, if you like."

"Be here at midnight then. I want you to meet one of the little men."

He rose to his feet. I noticed a bulge in his coat pocket, and pointed.

"Yes, I brought a revolver along," he said, and gripped my hand.

"Tomorrow night then, without fail," I said, and showed him out.

NEXT afternoon I took my old car and motored down the Southampton Road to Petersfield. It was five o'clock by the time I got there. After a quick tea I took the Harting Road and passed through the village at the foot of the downs as the light began to fail. I had little time and pushed the car hard up the sharp gradient to the top. There I parked it at the side of the road and walked across the springy turf of the downs to the top of the Beacon. The last light had departed and the stars were beginning to sprinkle the sky. Below

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I could see the warm cluster of lights that was Harting.

I took a torch from my pocket and flashed it twice towards the south.

The minutes passed. It was cold, but windless. I drew my coat closer around me.

"Mr. Swan?" a voice asked.

"Yes." I could not see him and pulled out the torch.

"No, do not use it," the voice said. "Do you want to see Solomon?"

"Yes, quickly."

"Wait where you are then."

Five more minutes passed and then I heard a rustle in the grass.

"I am Solomon."

"Listen, Solomon, I am in touch with the men who are organizing the opposition. Will you come to London and talk with their leader tonight?"

There was a silence.

"Yes," he said at last.

"Will you let me carry you?"

He climbed up my coat for answer and sat on my shoulder. I walked back to the car. There I wrapped him in a rug and placed him on the front seat beside me. I turned the car around and started back for London.

"I have been waiting for you," said Solomon.

"I could not come before. Jellaby made me a member of the party and gave me the task of finding you. It took me some time to get in touch with the opposition."

"Tell me the news, then."

I told him about Gregory's visit, about the pilfering from munition works, the theft of rifles, and the gun-running from Ireland.

"That is all that I know which can help you," I said. "Now tell me your news."

"We were blown by that east wind all the way across England, and five of us were lost at sea. But the rest found their way, somehow, and are now on the downs. The last of them turned up yesterday. We spend the day practicing with the tubes, and educating the young. We miss the library."

"Is it difficult to get food?"

"Not very, but the farmers will notice sooner or later."

I thought of this highest manifestation of humanity living like animals on the bleak downs, raiding the farms by night and sleeping in rabbit warrens during the day.

"We have so much to do," said Solomon, in answer to my thoughts. "The counter-revolution must somehow be hurried up."

"And what then?" I asked.

"There is no answer to that unless we succeed."

"Jellaby offered me protection for you," I said. I could not in fairness hide this from him.

"Do you think he meant it?"

"I cannot tell, Solomon. All that I can say is that human beings are more miserable today in England than they have ever been, and I prefer to think that Jellaby would kill you all. It gives me a clear conscience in asking for your help."

"You have the glimmerings of honesty and objective thinking," said Solomon, and I laughed.

We loitered on the way, for I did not want to be back in town too soon. At Kingston I dawdled away an hour over dinner. It was nearly ten before we got to Marchmont Street. I took him up in my overcoat pocket.

Gregory arrived at a quarter to twelve. Solomon had already taken his position on the mantelpiece.

I introduced them. Gregory stepped to the mantelpiece and they looked at each other for some time. Then Gregory sat down.

"Are you willing to help us?" asked Gregory. But I knew from his strained face that a hope had died in him. People who saw them for the first time could have little faith in them. Already I could see Gregory's bitter self-contempt for having pinned his hope on . . . that!

"Jellaby's government is highly centralized, is it not?" asked Solomon.

Gregory started and flushed.

"Yes," he said.

"I take it," said Solomon, "that this is a small section of people which has usurped power. The Government has not the sanction of the majority. It holds its power through its control of the army, the navy, the police force, the air arm and the finances. The question is, how far the personnel of the services is in secret opposition. Does it approve or disapprove?"

"It obeys orders," said Gregory sharply. "Frankly, we do not know what is the answer to your question. Of late, leave has been given to the soldiers and sailors. They have gone home, and must have seen for themselves. But they are heavily bribed. Both in the police force and in the services the wages have been raised fifty per cent."

"But you believe yourself," said Solomon, "that they obey rather than approve. The

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question is, then, the number of people in England today who hold effective power. Who are the people in control?"

"What are you thinking about?" asked Gregory. I could see that he felt differently now. Hope had been born in him again.

"How many people would it be necessary to kill in order to break the Government?" asked Solomon.

"Not many."

"About how many?"

"Twenty-five, at the most."

"If you give me a list of them, and tell me where they are to be found on any one day, I shall get them killed for you," said Solomon.

"I WILL get you the list, and give you the directions, and my men will take you to any place you like," said Gregory. "I do not like assassination any more than the next man, but in certain circumstances I believe it justifiable."

"Of course," Solomon agreed. "But how are you to take power yourselves? The alternative must be there to hand."

"Yes," said Gregory. "But . . ." And he hesitated.

"Have you no plans?"

"Not yet."

"How long will it take you to get your arms to London?"

"I could do it in a week."

"Let us fix the day for a week tomorrow morning, then," said Solomon.

Gregory looked dumbfounded.

"You say that the killing of twenty-five men will be sufficient. A week tonight you will arrange for twenty-five of my people to be in their houses. They will be dead by morning. I shall put another hundred at your disposal. You can place them where you think fit. They will concentrate on killing the leaders of those who oppose you. As for the arrangements about taking power that morning, I leave those to you."

"We shall be very few," said Gregory doubtfully.

"We are acting on the assumption that the force of the dictatorship will be broken by the death of its leaders. All you have to do then is to be bold."

"Yes," said Gregory.

"And now," said Solomon, "we come to my terms. I want you to be quite clear about those."

Gregory bent forward in his chair, hands locked together between his knees.

"We have our own destiny to pursue, Mr. Gregory. Do not for a moment believe that I prefer one form of government to another. The fate of humanity is nothing to me. I would not raise a little finger to help you if I did not see in this bargain a substantial benefit to my people. You may think it is a hard bargain."

"What are the terms?" asked Gregory.

"I want freedom for my people, complete and absolute freedom. And power. If we ask that a thing be done, it must be done. We demand freedom to increase our numbers to any extent we consider advisable.

"We ask that all of our equipment for research should be at our disposal if we need it. And we shall want access to it at Oxford, Cambridge, London, and elsewhere. Further, your government must see to it that trained researchers shall be at our command, in any number we require. We are too small to use your instruments, but we can direct, and must have obedience. Our food supplies must be guaranteed, and our quarters also. But that is not so important. Nothing must interfere with our quest.

"You realize what this means? It means that a number of your people will be nothing less than our servants. It will be an increasing number. You, Mr. Gregory, I take it that you will have some say in the Government."

"I shall be Prime Minister," said Gregory quietly.

"Do you promise then?"

"I do. But I cannot be held responsible for my colleagues. Some of them may object."

"They can always be assassinated," said Solomon quietly.

"That would be government by force again!"

"All government is by force, if you think of it."

Gregory nodded.

"This confusion and strife between human beings must be stopped," said Solomon. "It will interfere eternally with our work. What is it human beings want?"

"There is only one way," said Gregory. "There must be a brotherhood, a sense of neighbor. Our system today is a system of scramble, each man against his fellow. A competitive shambles, based upon the urge of profit and the exploitation of others. We all do it, in one way or another. If this obsession with things can be cured, if the personal holding of the instruments of profit can be abolished, I think we should be in a fair way to something better. It would be a beginning at any rate."

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Solomon nodded.

"Your system is a very old one, and its motives appeared when the first man rose from the apes. These things cannot be cured in a day. To do it at one stroke would cause infinite pain to a large number. I have read your papers, and know. There is no need to cause more pain than is strictly necessary. Tell me, can you think of no way in which this change you desire in your system can be brought about gradually? According to the English tradition?"

Solomon smiled, for he had his own sense of humor.

"It has only been done by revolution so far," said Gregory. "There is no record of a privileged class giving up its privileges without a struggle and blood. The moment those privileges are threatened, they show their hackles. You know what happened here when Labor started putting its program into force. *They* do not hesitate. Germany, Italy, Spain, France. . . ."

"Let us then, just to please the English," said Solomon, and I could swear that he was laughing to himself, "create a precedent. I propose that we wean the privileged from their privileges not by force and revolution, but gradually, according to the way their historians so strongly approved. There is one thing they all agree is the very basis of their contract with life, and that is . . . competition. It seems—I am always quoting their soundest authorities—that there has always been competition, and that there always will be. It is, they say, the very breath of life. Well then, let them have competition to the full."

"What do you mean?" Gregory asked.

"I mean that we should enter into competition with them, brain against brain. My men will research. They will produce new tastes in drink, new flavors in food, new smells even, new perfumes for the women, new condiments and intoxicants for the men. They will produce a hundred novel things in industry, fresh metals and alloys. . . . I can see no end to it. They will solve the problem which has baffled you, of releasing economically the latent forces of the atom. But whatever it is my men and women discover, that thing will be exploited by the state alone, in equal and fair competition with the products of today. I think I can promise you that very few private factories will be in production within fifty years."

"God!" said Gregory, "if it could only be done! I wish you could be Prime Minister yourself, sir."

"Oh, I shall be in everything but name," said Solomon quietly. "Yes, I think I shall be. You see . . . it is high time human beings were governed objectively, without passion or partisanship, by a referee. Some one said that no man is fit enough to govern his brother. Well, I am no man, thank God."

Gregory put a hand up to his mouth and pondered.

"Yes, I accept your program," he said. "Competition." There was a twinkle in his sombre eye. "Competition with the state. I accept that. But in the meantime, we shall have to produce some sort of immediate program, an amelioration of things as they are. You have told us what the privileged people want, competition, but what of the common people?"

Solomon closed his eyes.

"I will quote from a book Mr. Swan has in this room. Napoleon read it and repeated it to me. 'We want,' says the authoress, 'as the Romans of old did, bread and circuses, and a little drink; we want leisure and comfort, peace and plenty (which means, I suppose, a lot to eat), a little adventure, good company, something to amuse and interest us, money to turn in our pockets; we want to scrape through life with as little annoyance as may be, and to have a rapid and easy death. We want something on which to exercise our faculty of admiration: we want, that is, some variant of that which we call beauty. We want success, love, and the appreciation of our fellows; and some of us want to reproduce our kind.'"

I remembered that. It was Rose Macaulay.

"You see," said Solomon, "very few of those things can be given even by the wisest government. If I were you, I would concentrate on the circuses until my men have made it possible for your people to get the other things.

"And now," Solomon said, "you must go."

And the man who hoped to be Prime Minister went, like a lamb.

I TOOK Solomon back to his people in the morning and returned to town.

Gregory came to see me again in the evening.

"We have only six days," he said. "I should have protested against it, still. . . . We must have a house to store our arms in. There is one in Highgate, a large, ramshackle mansion which has been to let for some time. It is already taken, on a seven years' lease, in your name. There was a

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difficulty at first about references, but when the agents were told that you were a member of the party, that disappeared. Phut!" He snapped his fingers and smiled. "You will be moving in the rest of this week. Do you understand?"

"No," I said. "To begin with, I have no furniture."

"You do not need furniture, man. The vans will arrive, some tomorrow, others later, with cases. It is a large house. You will want a lot of furniture. Now, do you understand?"

"I think I do."

Gregory consulted the back of an envelope.

"We don't want any visitors after the cases arrive. So," he began ticking off on his fingers, "the telephone has been installed today. The water was never turned off, so that is all right. The electric current and the gas will be reconnected tomorrow morning. That, I think, covers everything."

"I shall have to warn Smythe I am moving."

"Yes, do that."

"Another thing. There must be someone there to receive cases and chase the tradesmen away."

"I had thought of that. There's a housekeeper there—Miss Marshall. Yes, she is all right. You need not worry."

I asked him about the list.

"I don't carry it about with me, naturally. There are twenty-six names on it. Astonishing," he mused, "how power boils down, when you come to think of it. Jellaby himself is about eighty per cent of the Freedom party. The other twenty-five cover the whole field. It is not a high price to pay for democracy."

"No," I said doubtfully. "it is not. But don't forget, there is a powerful section of people at the back of the Freedom Party. It won't be so easy to deal with."

"I know what you mean, Swan, but the revolution was a dirty business. Even the men at the back of the party didn't like it. You can't go on talking, and believing, too, about the Englishman's this and the Englishman's that for a lifetime, and then feel any joy at the discovery that he is only an Italian or a German under the skin. In their hearts they hate this German-Italian way of running the country. They are uneasy all right, ashamed, too, in a way. They are determined, all the same, to keep Jellaby going, but they have eased their consciences by delegating the dirty work. Those twenty-six really run the whole show. Wipe them out, and you have a temporarily disorganized mob of people who just won't know what to do."

"I don't like that house business," I said, reverting to the arrangements. "Something is sure to happen. A case will break open, an authorized official will call. . . ."

"We must risk that," said Gregory impatiently. "Damn it, you can't run a counter-revolution like a sewing machine. *You* are a risk, come to that. For all I know you may wait until Saturday night and then give the whole show away. I have to chance your loyalty."

"Yes, of course. And what about the arrangements? I don't want to fool my neck away in some bungled affair."

"Two of the men on the list are in Glasgow, one in Birmingham, one in Liverpool, one in Gloucester, and the rest in London or out Surrey way. I have a photograph of each to help your men. We don't want any mistakes. On Friday morning cars will set out to get to Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Gloucester by evening. They will take your men along, and arrangements have been made to get them dropped at nightfall near the houses on the list. I can arrange all that if you tell me how to get in touch with your people."

I told him, two flashes to the south at nightfall from the Beacon. Gregory nodded.

"The London contingent will be brought up separately, in a van, to your house in Highgate. They will arrive on Saturday evening, and twenty-one of them will be taken to the allotted houses by my men. You have absolute faith in them?"

"Oh, yes, they will do their job. What I am worried about is your end. It will not be enough to assassinate these men. You will have to make a show of some kind. What *is* the centre of government in England?"

"We shall have to take the House of Commons, occupying Downing Street, and get hold of the B.B.C. And perhaps, as a gesture and a symbol, the Abbey. Yes, certainly the Abbey. And of course Buckingham Palace, to protect the King and Queen."

"But just *how* are you going to do that?"

"I've got the men. They can be trusted. They don't know yet what is expected of them, but they know it may mean death, and they will fight, to the death. There is nothing else left for them to fight, anyway. I have picked them for their hate, and because they can handle a gun. Say a thousand men, then."

"And another three hundred for build-

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ing the barricades. They will get to Highgate by four o'clock in the morning. Most of them will be hiding in the woods on Hampstead Heath during the night, but they will be at your house by four. There, they will get their guns. In the meantime the three hundred laborers will be constructing barricades on all the roads leading to the hill."

"But a barricade is no use, man. The first field piece will shatter it to pieces."

"Of course it will. I know a barricade is no earthly use, but it will do this. It will localize the rising. I want Jellaby's men to realize that the whole force is concentrated on the hill. I want them to surround it. It is part of the plan. This is a desperate venture, and we must take desperate risks."

"But what the devil for? You will not be able to hold out for an hour."

"Look at this," and he pulled a sketch map from his pocket. "Notice how few the roads are which lead to Highgate Hill. The soldiers will have to go this way, or this way." He began pointing out the various routes with a pencil. "There are not more than seven of them altogether, you see. And along those seven roads I am going to plant the rest of your men. No man in authority must get near, do you understand? Every officer must be killed with darts, *anyone* who takes charge. Do you see what I mean? How long do you think the soldiers and the police are going to stand that?"

"It might work," I admitted grudgingly.

"It's got to work. The soldiers will waver. It must be hell to get death from the air, like that, without knowing where it comes from. And when the soldiers waver, they've got to be worked on."

"How?"

Gregory grinned wearily.

"The best part of the plan, perhaps. All along those seven roads there will be men in the houses—some of them are already there—some will go and lodge there during the week. They are prepared to die for this. I mean that. When the soldiers waver, they will put their heads out of the windows and shout, 'Down with Jellaby.' It all depends how the soldiers will take that. Don't forget that they will all know by then that Jellaby is dead, and the others too. We shall release that news in various parts of London at four, whether they are dead or not. Men will run through the streets, shouting it. We shall keep the telephones busy. By a quarter past four half London will be in the streets, jostling and talking about the death of Jellaby."

"By God, I think it will work, Gregory."

"It's got to work, or . . ." and he made the motion of tying a rope round his neck

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I DID not see Gregory again until Saturday evening. I had gone through my own program conscientiously, had told Smythe that I was taking a house in Highgate and given him the address, and had spent the rest of the week pretending, as usual, to look for the little men. On Thursday afternoon I went up to Highgate to look at the house. I had some difficulty in finding it, but did not dare ask the way.

Miss Marshall, a friendly, ugly little woman of forty-five, was there. There were curtains over all the windows, and lights were lit here and there. The basement was full of boxes, and so was the hall. I passed through a narrow defile between them. In the basement kitchen four men were at work, assembling the machine guns. They paid no attention to me, but went on with their work.

"You have a great deal of furniture, Mr. Swan," said the little lady as I left, and squeezed by hand.

"Don't make any mistakes," I whispered.

"That works goes on day and night, but between seven in the evening and seven in the morning, there is not a sound, and not a chink of light."

I nodded cheerfully, and got into my car.

On Saturday morning Smythe told me, without lifting his head from the pencil he was sharpening, that Jellaby would see me at ten o'clock on Monday morning.

"Moved into your house yet?" he asked, suddenly looking up.

"I am sleeping there tonight, for the first time."

"We members of the party don't do much sleeping," he murmured, and grinned sardonically.

I wondered what he meant by that. My thoughts flew to the preparations which were going on. Were they to be scotched at the last minute? Had the show been given away? Or was it something which he knew about me personally? Why, exactly, did Jellaby want to see me on Monday?

I prayed that I would never know.

In the afternoon I packed my belongings, said goodbye to the Irish girl, and went up to Highgate. A man in shirt sleeves came out and carried in my bags.

I had tea in one of the upstairs rooms with Miss Marshall. We sat on two rickety

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cane chairs and talked in front of the gas fire.

"Are you not afraid, Miss Marshall?"

"Are you?" she countered.

"Yes, more than I have ever been in my life."

She nodded her ugly little head.

"Tomorrow," she said, "it will be all over."

"Are you as sure as all that?"

"Yes, of course. If I were not sure, I could not go on."

She told me then of the work she had done all her life, in Vienna, in Germany, in Madrid and Bilbao and Santander, in Brazil, and later in Paris and Calais. Always she had fought the Beast, wherever it had reared its head. Her faith in democracy and the common people was as simple as it was beautiful. Love and pity drove her about the world, and had at last brought her to this shabby old house on the top of Highgate Hill.

"I never thought it would happen here," she said. "Now, there *can* be nothing but death or victory for us."

"You do not shrink from assassination, then?"

"I hate it, but . . . I have seen so much death, and always our people. When I was a girl millions of men were killed, for nothing. Oh, less than nothing. These few deaths will purchase . . . think of England tomorrow! Think of the concentration camps, the jails, the million homes of the poor people. If I could bring release by killing my own child I would do so."

"Yes," I said.

"If we do not seek anything for ourselves we cannot be far wrong."

"No," I said.

"You have travelled about England, and seen?"

"Yes," I said.

"Your little people," she asked, "are they doing it for the same reasons?"

"No, Solomon, their leader, says that one Government or another means nothing to him. Human beings are too trivial and foolish to bother about. His men will assassinate tonight to fulfill the bargain. If what they wanted could be got by assassinating twenty-six of us, they would do it equally cheerfully."

Have they no feelings, then?"

"Yes, but they are abstract feelings, so far as I can make out. Their minds are mathematical. They know no pity, they do not know love, at least not in the way we know it. Solomon tells me that love and pity and self-sacrifice have ruined humanity, and led it into all kinds of falsities. Truth is all that matters to him, and all these feelings interfere with the truth."

"I am sorry for them," she said simply. "There can be no beauty in their lives."

"They say, on the other hand, that there is nothing but beauty. It lies," I hesitated, for I was not clear about it myself, "in a sense of proportion, in . . . in what the painters call significant form, in the thing which has shape under the appearance."

SHE did not understand me, indeed, I was far from lucid.

"Some of them may be killed," she said, "and that is surely sacrificing themselves for the community."

"But they do not consider it is. Their own individual lives do not matter to them. They are not in the least afraid of death, for they know that the community goes on, and that the work they are doing will be finished by someone else.

"They only live for that work. 'We live in each other' they say, quoting from the scriptures. It is the same with pity. Seeing that they do not value their own lives except for work, they do not value those of others, either. I think they feel what we call pity, but only when some work has been ruined or one of them finds that he has been working on the wrong lines. Illness in one of them causes no pity. They have no more pity than the usual surgeon has, but they are quite as efficient in dealing with the source of it. Come to think of it, we could get on without pity quite well."

"Don't say that. It is a good feeling in itself, like love."

"There again they differ. They love the purpose of life, but not life itself. Without purpose it is nothing. And Solomon says that the purpose of life is not what we say it is, the exercise of love, pity, and self-sacrifice, but understanding. He says that we are stewing in our own juice, instead of externalizing ourselves and getting on with the work.

"He says it is shameful the little that human beings have done in the vast time we have been in possession. If we had got on with the job instead of slobbering with pity, killing our very best people by calling upon them to sacrifice themselves, and dispersing our energies in love, we might have done a great deal more.

"We have been thinking too much about ourselves and too little about the work. And in any case—so he says—we have been complete failures. One has only to look upon the world to see that nearly all love is

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self-love, most sacrifice a theatrical gesture, and most pity a luxury."

I saw her bright eyes sharpening themselves into a point of light.

"What is to happen to us, then, if they get control?"

"So far as I can see, we are going to be kept, like cattle or slaves, to do the rough work, to be their servants."

"I shall fight them." She was indignant. "This is going to be worse than dictatorship."

"Solomon promises that we shall be very well kept, on the best straw, like prize cattle. They will stop war, and poverty, and exploitation, in fact, they will give us everything we have wanted for ourselves, but have failed to get. He asked me what more I wanted, and honestly, I could not tell him."

"I could," said Miss Marshall. "We want these things by our own efforts, and not imposed on us from above. It is the trying and the discipline of getting which matters more than the thing itself. I will *not* be a slave."

"They say you can help with the work, if you want to, and that that is the only true freedom a human being can know."

"I shall fight," said Miss Marshall, her eyes bright with battle. "Yes, I shall fight them."

GREGORY slipped into the house at midnight.

He looked dead tired, his eyes dull, his face white and lined. I gave him a stiff whisky.

There had been a change in the plans, he said. The men for the provinces had gone and had arrived. Telegrams had been received about the safe arrival of goods. At the last moment he had decided to distribute the remainder from his own garage. It was less risky.

Twenty-one men had left the garage, each with one of the little people in his pocket. Nothing much could go wrong there. Jellaby had been sleeping for some time at Number Ten, and he was there now. One of them had been loosened in the immediate neighborhood and had promptly disappeared.

"She was a woman," said Gregory. "Solomon chose her. I don't like that. Women should not be asked to kill."

"Their men and women are absolutely equal," I explained. "They would not understand your objections."

"They didn't," he said dryly, "and I had to let it go at that."

"Where are the others?" asked Miss Marshall.

"They were slipped from the van into the back garden. There are about a hundred."

"Isn't it time to post them along the roads?" I asked.

"I shall see to that later. I sent a map and written instructions to Solomon when the first men were fetched on Friday. I suppose he will have told them what they are to do."

"Sure to," I said. "And the men? Are they hiding on the Heath?"

"How the hell do I know?" he shouted, the veins standing out on his forehead. He was very near the breaking point.

"Gregory, go to bed at once. There is a divan in the next room," said Miss Marshall briskly.

"I can't sleep," he half moaned, and put his head in his hands.

"For an hour," said Miss Marshall, "then I shall wake you up. Come along."

She took him by the arm and led him to the next room.

"It is now a quarter past twelve," she said when she came back. "I shall not wake him until three. Can you distribute those men yourself? Take your car with the party flag. Nobody would stop that."

I agreed and walked out into the garden.

"Solomon," I whispered.

There was a short delay, and then I heard his voice.

"Here I am."

I walked into the house and talked to him in the passage. Yes, each man knew exactly what position to take up. All that was necessary was to take them along the streets.

"They knew the numbers," said Solomon. "If you go slowly the men can drop off the back of the car. I shall watch the numbers and tell them."

"There won't be many people about," I said, "but they must beware of policemen."

"I shall tell them."

"Come along then. I shall leave the front door open and your people can come through. If I cough, it will mean that someone is coming."

"Please open the back door for me," said Solomon.

I did so, and walked through the house and out to the car. It refused to start on the battery and I had to pull it up. When the engine started I got into the driving seat and watched.

One after the other they flitted along

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the ground and dropped into the back, and into the driving seat at my side.

"Solomon," I whispered.

"Yes."

"Can they all get in?"

"Yes, I think so," after a pause.

I waited, then. Once, only, I had to cough for a late comer who trudged solidly along the pavement. Then they began filing in again. A light mist hanging in the air made the street lamps glow large.

"Drive on," said Solomon.

For the next hour I drove about the streets, slowly, with no word said. Here and there policemen saluted my flag, wondering, no doubt, why a member of the party should travel in such a relic. Now and again, when there were pedestrians in sight, I stopped altogether, moving on when the road was clear. We passed slowly through the seven streets that had been marked on Gregory's map and came back to the house.

"They are all gone," said Solomon, and we went into the house.

There was nothing more to be done. Solomon went out into the garden. Miss Marshall took up her knitting, and I sat on the bed. Nothing disturbed the silence save the clicking of her needles. At half past two the foreman of the assemblers came in and announced that everything was ready. Miss Marshall, without a word, took four bottles of beer and gave them to him. He grinned delightedly and went out. She took up her knitting and silence was resumed.

THIS, the span of silence before action, was trying in the extreme. I found myself rubbing my hands together softly, yawning and shifting my feet nervously. Each time I did that Miss Marshall's eyes turned towards me reproachfully, as if I were disturbing her perfect peace. I tried not to think, but a procession of pictures rose and flooded the brain and ebbed away again—Solomon in the fork of a tree, thinking of what? Men pressed against the cold tree trunks on the Heath, their last night on earth perhaps; Jellaby's bedroom. The bedrooms of twenty-six sound sleepers, and the sigh of the flying darts. How many of them were dead already?

I thought, too, of Gregory stretched upon his bed; of little men cowering on roof tops in the shelter of chimney stacks; of those who were to cry treason from the windows; of the soldiers now lying stretched out on their beds at the barracks; of the police who would soon be buckling on their revolvers and driving helter skelter through the streets. The train was laid. Nothing could now stop the explosion. Nothing.

A profound depression settled upon me. What, after all, were we trying to do? To overwhelm a dictatorship which was loathsome, certainly, but to replace it with—what? I remembered snatches of a talk with Solomon.

"Education," I said. "The clue lies in education. It is a long, slow process, but it is bound to succeed in the end."

"Education," he mused. "So you believe in that? Say, you do fill the young mind with a sense of human destiny, a shape of life. What, then? They pour out of your schools to the adult teaching of their daily lives, the shop, the factory, the office. What becomes of them? They are subjected to the self-interest of the employer, of the shareholder, driven by your competitive system to shifts and distortions which the masters themselves may deplore, but are helpless to remedy.

"Your system is a Fate, a Thing, automatic and relentless. And when your young men and women are released from this to their leisure, they go to the cinema, the theatre, the evening paper, the book, the wireless, all controlled and driven under the same pitiless pressure of competition and profit making. You may do as you like with education. You can make it perfect, if you care, but fifty-five years of a man's life are spent in a school beyond your control, where everything he learnt is undone. I tell you it is no good, no good at all."

"Not unless you can change the matrix of their after-school life," I admitted. "But is not that possible?"

He had shrugged his shoulders.

"Socialism?" I had asked tentatively.

"Oh, any system *works*," said Solomon. "You need not be afraid of that. Dictatorship, autocracy, democracy, communism, socialism, feudalism, anything will work. That is the odd thing about you. You are so elastic. You will assume any form imposed upon you. But whether any one of them is better than another I do not know. It all depends what human beings want to be. And look at the diversity there! A very large section of people will say that the purpose and end of human life is to be Christian. Another very large number will lay the stress upon economic efficiency.

"In the end, I doubt whether the average man or woman wants anything out of

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life but that it should be pleasant. And of all the nastinesses, commend me to the average human being's conception of what makes life pleasant—good food, soft beds, pleasure, plenty of it, unwounded vanity, superiority over his fellows, and impasse in itself. . . . Ease and sloth, in so many words. I tell you that it is a Mess. No, it is time you disappeared."

And I thought now, in the small silent hours of conscience, of the motives which impelled us to this adventure. I wanted a story, Gregory wanted a premiership, Miss Marshall a field for expressing her hate; the suppressed groups wanted revenge. Yes, we wanted all that, but we wanted something more as well. There was, dimly in us all, a bud of promise, a belief that in Jellaby at any rate the human adventure had come to a full and disastrous stop. He was an end to the vague hope that release might come, some day, in this way or that.

Jellaby was the mess without faith, without hope, world without end. And always, if we were to know even moments of happiness, we demanded an exit. We might pay no attention to it, refuse to go by that door, but we did insist that the door be there. Jellaby's crime was that he had bricked it up.

We were no good, might never be any good, but we were not going to be sealed and stamped with an acceptance of our present selves. Jellaby's rule meant that. As we were, so should we remain. And Solomon, in his objective survey of us, agreed with his estimate.

"There is that profound division in your nature," he had told me. "You are animals, seeking God. You can neither be whole-hearted animals nor whole-hearted gods. And there lies the root of your disaster. Betwixt and betweens, a mess."

Miss Marshall rose and flung her knitting on the mantelpiece. "I heard something in the garden," she said. "They must be coming in. It is time to wake Gerogry."

It was then a quarter past three.

I WAITED a few minutes longer in the room. Miss Marshall did not come back. I rose and went downstairs. In the hall I met Solomon. He had a tube in his hands.

"They are passing out the guns below," he said.

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall wait in the front garden. A policeman might pass and the alarm must not be given for another half hour."

There were muffled sounds of scraping feet and the occasional clank of metal in the basement. At the bottom of the stairs was Gregory, his mop of black hair ruffled, a list in his hands.

"What is the time?" he snapped.

I looked at my watch. It was twenty-five past three.

"Another quarter of an hour and we shall be over with this. That will give the last of them time to get to the barricades."

Rifles, bombs, and ammunition were being passed quickly from hand to hand. The men's faces were glistening with sweat.

"The workmen are already marching to the positions marked for the barricades." He talked quickly, decisively. "They should start building them in five minutes."

"With what?" I asked.

"Stones, bricks from the walls, furniture from nearby houses. Anything."

A young man rushed in from the garden, saluted, and talked to him.

"Yes, B Company will cover the Heath from the crest of the hill, in the back gardens. You can have twelve machine guns. We have no little men on the Heath."

"Yes, sir." The young man saluted and was gone.

"What time is it now?" said Gregory.

"Two minutes to half past."

"Go up to the sitting room," he ordered. "There's a telephone on the mantelpiece, and a list of twelve calls to be put through. Call the first on the list at half past, and go right on. When you are put through, say that Jellaby has committed suicide, and that it is all up."

I went to the sitting-room and turned up the light. I looked at my watch and waited. I was just picking up the receiver when the village clock boomed the single stroke for the half hour. I put the first call through.

The ringing went on an on for what seemed an eternity. I looked at the minute hand. It was only thirty-five seconds since I had put the call through.

"Hello, hello, what the hell is it?" an irritable voice called.

"Jellaby has committed suicide. It is all up." And I rang off whilst the exclamation of surprise and dismay was still echoing in my ears.

I went on making the calls. Two of them I could not get, and passed on to the others. When I had done seven I rang up the two which had failed, and got one of them. A single shot rang out on the air. It was beginning, I thought. The last

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on my list, I noticed, was a police station.

Gregory came in.

He took the receiver from my hands and put through the police call.

"Listen!" He spoke down the receiver. "Jellaby has committed suicide. Yes, dead. All the heads have been assassinated. Yes, all of them. The counter-revolutionaries are massed at Highgate Village. It is all up. Get into civvies, quick, and save yourselves."

Then he put down the receiver.

"That message has been put through to all stations," he told me. "It may help. Some of the police are sure to lie low. Come along."

The first we visited was down near the bottom of Highgate Hill. It was here the policeman had been killed by the shot I heard.

A man reported. Yes, all was ready. They were digging in at the bottom of Waterlow Park. He had nothing to report, save a few private cars which had been turned back. The streets beyond the barricade were getting lively.

I turned the car round and went up the hill again and down Swains Lane. Here, too, they reported all ready. The cemeteries on either side had been occupied. (Karl Marx's grave is in the eastern one.) Some of the Holly Lodge flats had been broken into and machine guns installed.

Up the steep lane again and down West Hill. There were lights in all the windows now, and men were putting out their heads and shouting. A huge barricade had been erected towards the bottom of the hill. Three motor cars had been overturned, and there was a strong smell of petrol. I remembered that smell later.

AWAY over to the left, possibly from Highgate Hill, there came a burst of machine-gun fire.

"Come along," shouted Gregory.

The old car chugged valiantly up the hill once more, and we turned to the left at the top, into the Grove. A working man, with a cap on his head and a scarf round his neck, came out of one of the houses.

He spoke slowly, deliberately, as he reported. The men were in the back gardens, under shelter of the walls. The machine guns were well hidden. Yes, he had just come back from a tour of the lines. They covered the whole park from there. It would be difficult to attack successfully from the Heath. Nothing would live in the barrage they could put up.

We visited three posts to the east. And everywhere the answer was the same. The barricades were up, the machine guns posted, and nothing had happened, so far.

There was pandemonium in the village itself. Men were pouring out of the houses, some tying their ties, some with their bootlaces flapping.

"Jellaby is dead," I shouted as we went past.

Behind us we could hear a faint cheer.

"Back to the house," said Gregory.

He ran into the sitting-room, where Miss Marshall was waiting near the telephone.

"Any messages?"

"The Okay from all posts," she answered.

At that moment the telephone rang. Gregory picked it up, and listened.

"Good," he said after a while, and put it down.

"From Kensington," he said. "There are crowds in the streets, milling round and cheering."

Reports came in thick and fast. All over London people were in the streets, shouting, discussing, talking. Cafés were opening and doing a brisk trade. Then a report that a char-a-banc full of police had set off from Belgravia, northwards. Troops were being rushed from Knightsbridge. Something was happening at Chelsea Barracks. Yes, shooting, but the man could not say what it was. Then Gregory, listening to one report, fell silent. When the call was over he looked grave.

"Ten tanks," he said, "from the Freedom Barracks at Victoria. They have just set out."

Suddenly I remembered the smell of petrol.

"Look," I said, "there are plenty of garages in the Village. There's the petrol. Pour it down hill as the tanks come up."

"Run," shouted Gregory.

Within five minutes I was taking a load of cans down West Hill. At the barricade I halted.

"Tanks are coming," I told the man in charge. "When they breast the slope pour out the petrol and then set it on fire. Here, four or five men who can drive a car," I shouted. "Go up the hill and rush petrol to the other posts. Commandeer cars."

Five men stepped forward at once and set up the hill in my car.

"Waiting here?" the commander asked.

"Yes."

He handed me a rifle and a belt of clips.

From where we were, we could see the trolley bus terminus at Parliament Hill Fields and the road dipping away into the distance.

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I had been there five minutes when the first lorry disgorged its load of soldiers about three hundred yards down the road. We could just see them under the street lamps.

"Shall we fire?" asked the commander.

"No, wait. There are little men in those houses on the left there. We must see what the effect is on the soldiers when they kill the officers."

IT WAS very difficult to see what was happening. Some of the soldiers were coming along the road. Others had gone into Parliament Hill Fields. When the soldiers on the road had advanced fifty yards or so, they halted. There were faint shouts and they bunched together.

"That will be our men shouting 'Down with Jellaby'," I said.

One of the soldiers came running up the road, waving a handkerchief.

"Get ready, men," shouted the commander.

"Where's the telephone?" I asked.

"In that house on the left."

"Here," I ordered a stranger, "run to that house, get the man to ring up Gregory, and tell him to hold the line."

The man raced to the house and disappeared. A moment later he had thrown up a window.

"Hold the line," I shouted.

The soldier was still running towards us. He arrived panting, tore his cap off and mopped his brow.

"Come along," he gasped.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Get your breath."

"The general's been killed, and the colonel. Here, come along. We are with you. Jellaby's dead."

I had to speak to Gregory, and rushed into the house.

"Gregory, the soldiers here . . . yes, regulars . . . have joined in. They want us to go forward."

I could almost sense Gregory's agony at that moment. Was it a ruse?

"The same thing has happened at Highgate Station," he said, and paused. Then he shouted, almost deafening me: "Join them."

I went back to the commander.

"It's the little men killed them," he said.

"Come along, forward everybody."

Messages were sent to left and right. In less than five minutes some two hundred and fifty men were walking down the road or across the Parliament Hill Fields. The soldiers were shouting, "Down with Jellaby" from the windows of the houses. They were not all Gregory's men, I thought.

And now I have come to the end of my story. The rest of it is known to all. Everywhere, the soldiers joined in with our men and turned towards the heart of London.

One small police station in Tottenham Court Road put up a fight, but not for long. The ten tanks were discovered abandoned at Swiss Cottage. Jellaby's militia deployed from the Round Stone Pond at Hampstead to cross the Heath. There they waited an hour for orders, but none came. Between Hampstead Tube Station and the Pond, a distance of two hundred yards, the little people bagged no fewer than ten officers. Rumors began to fly through the ranks, and they melted, mysteriously, until none was left. London was captured.

All save the B.B.C. building. There, the steel doors and grilles built for just such an emergency were in position. It was not until the soldiers had played a tattoo of bullets on its windows and brought a cascade of glass crashing into the street, not before two field pieces in Portland Place had trained their ugly snouts at the main door that the night staff gave in. Five minutes later, Gregory himself was speaking to the nation, telling it of its deliverance.

His voice killed stone dead the few sporadic resistances put up in the provincial towns.

England had been regained for democracy.

Or, to be more truthful, England had been put in the hands of Solomon.

For of all the fantastic things that happened in the capital that day, the one that stands out most astonishingly in the memory is the triumphal march of the victorious people down Whitehall from Piccadilly. I may live until I am a hundred but I shall never forget the picture of an Italian waiter from the Ritz holding poised above his head a gold plate, and sitting on the purple cushion placed thereon, the figure of Solomon, his head in his hands.

As the stocky little waiter, in the glory of his brief hour, strutted down the wide street, a hush fell upon the multitude. They stared aghast at the bowed figure, but not once did he look upon them. And indeed, from what I know of him, not once did he think of them. His thoughts were far removed from them in a world they could never hope to share or fathom.

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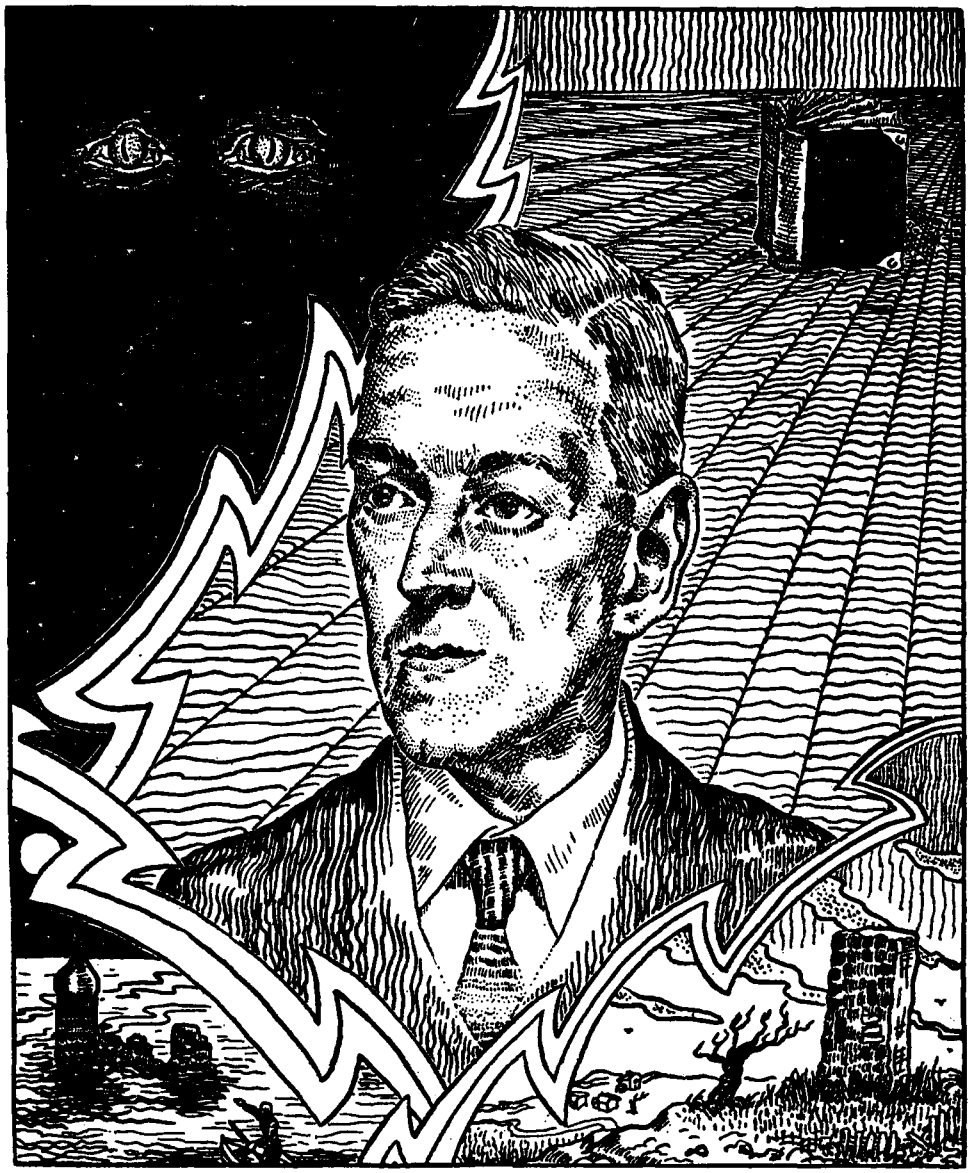

MASTERS OF FANTASY

Howard Phillips Lovecraft—"The Outsider"—1890-1937.

"His own most fantastic creation," he has been called, this strange anachronistic genius whose pen, now ten years stilled, once scratched, in a spidery chirography, masterpieces of earthly terror and cosmic horror. A financial failure in his life-time (200 copies of his little book, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," could only be sold at the lowest prices), his fame as a master of the macabre has posthumously pyramided. He enriched the field of fantastic literature with the *Necronomicon*—the tome *diabolique*—and the Cthulhu (a word which only he could properly *whistle)* Mythology. As an individual, he was a gentleman—in the precise sense of the word—of incredible erudition. When HPL turned the Silver Key in the lock of after-life and stepped *into the world Beyond the Wall of Sleep, he was surely no stranger to its wonders, but a prince* of the supramundane, welcomed home by the Elder Gods.

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BOOMERANG

By

George Whitley

They tore the veil of mystery that had hidden the ancient secret of the Queen of Night, and found the answer to whether her pale smile had promised Life—or ruthless Death. . . .

THE old man sat in the thin winter sunshine, watching the Manly Ferry come alongside at the Circular Quay. Off Fort MacQuarie she lost the wind, drifted sluggishly until she was abeam of the shallow gully between piles of fuzed rubble that was still called Argyle Street, then hung helpless and motionless. The old man smiled as he watched the passengers struggling with the long, heavy sweeps. "In the old days," he said to the boy at his side, "they'd 'a' asked fer their money back. But then things was dif'rent here in Sydney. If yer didn't like the ferry yer could allus get a car over the bridge—an' look at it now!" His voice shook with senile grief as he gestured toward the broken towers, the straggle of rusted, twisted girders between them like some monstrous, leggy insect defiling the blue waters of the harbour with its death throes. "Look wot them devils did to our bridge!"

The boy was not listening. He was playing with a flat piece of wood shaped like half a pair of parentheses. It had been given him by the old blackfellow who called himself King Tommy, who was reputed to be the last of his race in Australia. Trying to imitate the practised skill of his aboriginal mentor, he threw the toy. It flew with lazy grace, circled slowly. The boy clapped his hands when he saw that he had at last mastered the knack of making it behave as it should. He reached up childish hands to catch it, succeeded only in tipping it, destroying its equilibrium, so that it fell, with a loud clatter, onto the old man's bald head.

He rose wrathfully to his feet.

"Wot's this yer playin' with? A boomerang? An' 'oo gave it yer? That old rascal Tommy? 'E should 'a' been killed off arter the Risin'—same as all 'is cobbers were. Not too late now—the League committee allus does wot I wants 'em to. . . . Arter all, I'm the only one in the bunch wot *is* a Returned Soldier. . . ."

"Yer wouldn't 'ave Tommy shot, Granddad, would yer?"

The old man smiled at the boy.

"'Course not, Dave. 'Im an' me is the only ones left wot can remember the old days. . . . I saw this 'arbour when it was full o' ships—ships from the old country, ships from the States, takin' away our mutton an' wool, bringin' ammo for the war. . . . An' there'd be the big liners—millions o' men they'd take. An' all for the war. An' then, when the war was over, we 'ad the big ships bringin' our men back. . . . Yair . . . them was the days. An' there was the wireless, so yer could listen ter the races all Saturdee arternoon without settin' foot outside the boozer; an' there was the picshers. . . . Oh, yer've no idee, Dave! An' it was all along o' somethin' like this"—he lifted the boomerang in his withered

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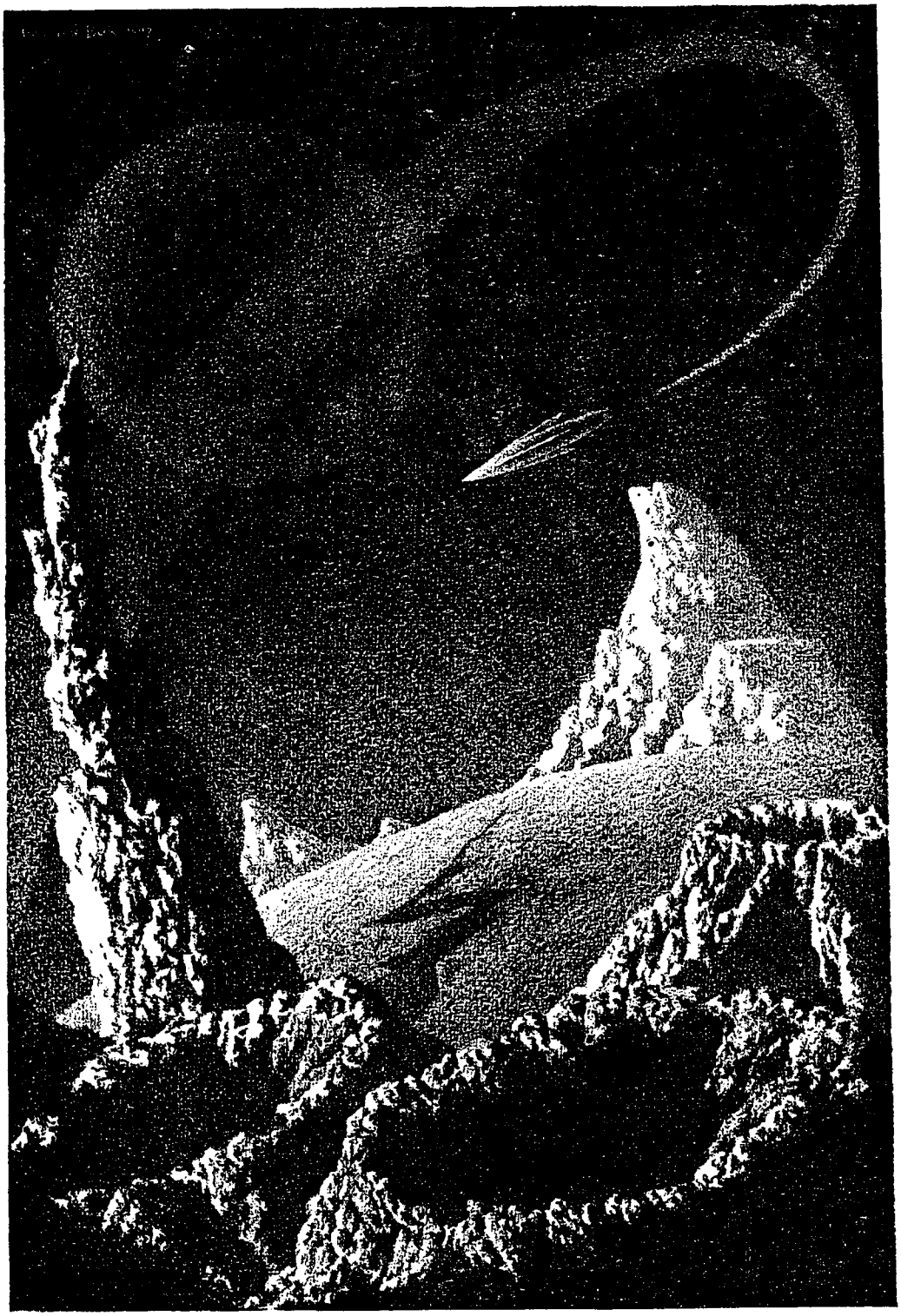

"There was these rockets goin' up all ther time. . . ."

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hand—"that it all finished. We killed the scientists an' the engineers—an' there was a book burnin' that'd 'a' made old 'Itler look silly. . . . An' we smashed all the machines. An' all a'cause o' this. . . ."

"But wot did 'appen, Granddad? Father Coogan says that we made ourselves wings an' flew too high, an' the angels sent down fire from 'Eaven an' burned us all up. Well, nearly all."

"Just wot the Father would say. 'E's a good man in 'is own way, Dave, an' 'e does 'is job. But 'e wasn't 'ere when it 'appened —wasn't even thought of. An' *I* was. . . .

"It all started just arter the war. We was fightin' some little yeller fiends called Japs. Oh, ev'rybody was fightin'—I can't rightly call ter mind 'oo was fightin' which. There was the Pommies an' the Yanks an' the Russians an' the Poles an' the Froggies. . . . An' back in the old country they was fightin' old 'Itler an' 'is Jerries—but 'e got knocked out afore the Japs. An' we all thought it'd take years to finish *them* off—an' then the Yanks come along wi' somethin' they called an atomic bomb. They dropped it from airyplanes—ships wot flew in the sky, they was—an' one o' these bombs'd wipe out a city. An' then the Japs threw their 'ands in.

"Now, in the other war, in the old country, the Jerries 'ad been usin' some things called rockets. They wasn't the same as airyplanes—they could fly a lot 'igher an' a helluva lot faster. They used 'em ter blitz Lunnon all the way from Berlin—that was where 'Itler lived—an' they reckon that if Joe—'e was 'ead o' the Russians—'adn't got there in time ter stop 'im, 'e'd 'a' used 'em ter blitz Noo York an' Sydney. An' they allus reckoned that they could use 'em ter fly ter the moon. . . ." He looked up to the eastern sky where low, pale and remote hung the first objective in man's drive to interplanetary empire. "Yair, the moon. But 'Itler an' 'is Jerries never done it—we took all their rockets away from 'em. . . .

"Well, these 'ere atomic bombs, they was mixed up in it. It seems that they used some stuff called U235—wot it was I disremember. But it went off very loud an' strong—about an 'undred times as strong as gunpowder. Maybe more. Any'ow, they got it ter burn slow like, an', when they 'ad it 'ow they wanted it, they could use it instead o' coal or petrol or any o' them ter drive the machines. Yair. . . . We 'ad machines for *everything* in them days. A man needn't soil 'is 'ands—an' if 'e did a machine'd wash 'em for 'im!

"An' this 'ere U235 was wot the rocket jokers was waitin' for. With that in their rockets there was no limit to 'ow far they could go—the moon was nuthin'. They could go ter the sun if they wanted—or the stars. But they wanted ter go ter the moon first, just ter see wot it was reelly like that 'igh up.

"BUT it was a year or two, at least, afore men went up in the rockets. They sent 'em up at first without crews—fifty miles, two 'undred miles, a thousand miles. An' they 'ad 'em packed full 'o all kinds o' gadgets like yer dad's thermometer—so as they could see wot they'd 'ave ter wear an' so on when they got up there. Then they started sendin' 'em round the moon. These 'uns 'ad automatic cameras —takin' picshers all the time they was as they flew round. Soon they 'ad better maps of it all than o' many a place around 'ere. . . ."

"But is it very big, Granddad? Is it as big as Garden Island?"

"Bigger. Lots bigger. Why, it must be very near as big as Tasmania—though it doesn't look it from 'ere.

"Any'ow, there was these rockets goin' up the 'ole time. Yer'd see 'em at night—the distant ones like shootin' stars goin' the wrong way, the ones from close to like great spears o' blue fire pokin' up inter the sky. An' now an' again we'd see one o' the things comin' down, danglin' on the end of its parachute an' lookin' as 'armless as a little ole man under a big umbrella. They was allus very careful that there was none o' that U235 left in their motors when they got back. I don't think that even the clever 'uns understood it properly—they was all more'n 'arf scared. But they 'ad ter go on playin' with it just the same.

"Well, they got tired o' sendin' their rockets *round* the moon; they 'ad all the photygraphs an' maps they wanted. So somebody—I can't remember rightly 'oo it was; it was either the Yanks or the Russians—thought they'd try to *'it* the moon. So they took one o' their rockets, filled its nose up wi' U235, an' let it go. We didn't see it 'it—not 'ere we didn't. They 'ad it all worked out so as they could watch it from *their* side o' the world. But next night we saw where it *'ad* 'it. Ye've seen that big, black 'ole on the full moon, with all the lines runnin' out like a spider's web? Tyko, it's called. It looked about the same way back when nobody 'ad even 'eard o' rockets—but there wasn't that big black 'ole bang in the middle. The

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Russians—or 'ooever it was—did that when they scored a bull.

"Nuthin' would please 'em then but ter send men ter the moon. It was all arranged friendly like atween the dif'rent countries. Ev'rybody was ter start at the proper time—even to allowin' those on the side o' the earth away from the moon a bit o' grace. It was all so as nobody could say 'ow the moon belonged to 'im a'cause 'e was there first. It was to belong to *everybody*.

"At first there was ter be only one rocket from each country—then ev'ry city an' big town wanted its own ship. For months the sky was alive with little 'uns as the pilots an' crews practised takin' off an' landin'. Just crazy, they all was. An' there was all kinds o' nuts even crazier, paradin' the streets with big placards sayin' as 'ow we'd bring the wrath o' Gawd down on us. Most o' the parsons, though, was in favour—an' all the reel big rockets was blessed by bishops.

"I went out ter see the one they was buildin' at Mascot. She was a beaut, she was. *Southern Cross*, they called 'er. An' there she was, standin' up like a big tower o' silv'ry metal on the four 'uge fins at 'er tail. I was only a youngster in them days —an' I'd 'a' given *anything* to 'a' been one of 'er crew. Don't know as 'ow I wouldn't even now. . . . There *was* a sheila stowed away in 'er—they found out arter they blasted off. The pore little gal come to a bad end—but so did millions o' people down 'ere wot 'adn't 'er guts. So what?

"Then came the night when all the rockets from all over the world was ter get away. It was dark 'ere—the moon wasn't far off new. It was all worked out so as when they landed they'd be able ter flash light signals — some'ow the wireless wouldn't work over all that distance. Somethin' about 'eavy layers in the stratterspear or somethin'. I can't rightly remember. . . .

"There wasn't a soul in Sydney indoors that night. Even the people in the 'orspitals was out on the verandas to watch. An' the domain was solid wi' the crowd, an' all the beaches. An' it's a wonder the bridge didn't fall down wi' the weight o' men, women an' children on it.

"At first it was like VJ Day—people singin' an' drinkin' an' fightin'. There was shop winders smashed, an' there was bonfires blazin' in ev'ry street. One o' them jokers wi' the placards about the wrath o' Gawd would 'a' burned alive if someone 'adn't called out the military. The johns couldn't 'andle it. As it was, there was sixteen people killed an' Gawd knows 'ow many taken to 'orspital.

"But round about eleven things quietened down a bit. Soon the only sound was the Salvation Army band playin' some Moody an' Sankey 'ymn tune or other, very soft and mournful. An' that died away gradual like, softer an' softer, till there wasn't a sound. Not even a dawg barkin'. An' the stars looked down, 'an the Southern Cross 'ung bright in the sky. There was a sheila next ter me, an' she was 'arf cryin'. "Just think of it," she kept on sayin', 'our *Southern Cross'll* soon be up there. *Our Southern Cross*. My boy friend—'e's navigator of 'er. . . ." Can't say as 'ow it was true or not—there was an awful lot o' bums that night cadgin' drinks by sayin' they 'ad friends an' relatives in the rocket ship, that they knew a lot more than wot they reelly did.

"I remembers lookin' at my watch. Eleven forty-five, it was. Quarter to twelve. An' then, right across the four bright stars o' the Cross, flashes a streak o' dazzlin' blue. It was them cows in Melbourne beatin' the gun. A howl went up from the crowd—if anybody 'ad been mug enough ter let on as 'e was from Victoria 'e'd 'a' been dead for sure. They'd 'a' 'ung 'im from the bridge. . . . But if there was any Victorians present they 'ad the sense ter keep their dirty big mouths shut.

"But the boys at Mascot wasn't ter be caught nappin'. Couldn't 'a' been five minutes arter we saw *Matthew Flinders* streakin' up an' away that *Southern Cross* took the air. Yer've never seed a light like it—yer never will. I sneaked a look at that sheila next ter me—'er wot said 'er boy friend was in the crew—an' as much light seemed ter be comin' from 'er face as from the sky. She wouldn't 'a' changed places wi' the Queen o' England.

"But that light from the sky. . . . All our faces was raw the next day as though we'd been lyin' out at Bondi for a week, starin' straight at the sun. An' we 'eard 'er, too. Like all the boilers in the world blowin' off steam all together—but wot's the use? *You* wouldn't know a boiler if one came an' shook 'ands with yer. . . .

"An' we saw the rockets to the north an' the south an' the west, as Perth an' Brisbane, Adelaide an' Hobart got theirs up an' away. Pig Island was slow on the draw —but they got 'em off just afore midnight. Very far away they was to the east'ard—but very bright. It was like as if Gawd 'ad dipped 'Is pen inter the sun an' drawn thin

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lines o' fire up the sky. Wonder is that they were able to get up at all wi' the weight o' their tongue-twistin' names. . . . *Taranakimarama*. . . .

"An then we all sung *Advance, Australia Fair* an' *Waltzin' Matilda* an' went 'ome.

"It was only three or four days' run ter the moon, in them days. Some of us got up early the mornin' the papers an' the wireless said the first rockets'd be landin'. Just afore sunrise up come the last sliver o' the old moon—with the side where it was still night shinin' very faint an' ghostly. An' then we saw it all lit up as though all the bomber fleets in the world was droppin' parachute flares on a target. It was like a funny sort o' dawn—it *was* a dawn. It was the dawn of an empire like the old jokers wot first come out 'ere in their wooden ships never dreamed of. An' yet . . . I likes ter think as 'ow they'd 'a' been the first ter volunteer for the rockets.

"An' then the sun come up an' we couldn't see no more.

"IT WAS arter that as people got the idee as things wasn't just right. It'd all been fixed up that the crews o' the rockets was ter set up big signalin' lamps, that they was ter flash news to Earth of 'ow things was goin'. There *was* an awful lot o' flashin' goin' on for quite a while—but it wasn't searchlights. Then there was one lamp started jabberin' away in Morse. They never found out 'oo it was—the operator was in too much of a 'urry ter send 'is call sign. The message was in English—but then, there was the Pommies, the Yanks, the Pig Islanders, the Afrikanders . . . oh, Gawd knows 'ow many. An' 'e was a damn rotten sender, too. They tried all they knew, but they couldn't make 'ead or tail of 'is signal. There was somethin' about somebody attackin' somebody—but 'oo was fightin' which, they never found out.

"An' then it come out that most o' the rockets was armed. O' course they all said as it was just in case there was savages or wild animals on the moon—but ev'rybody knew as 'ow there wasn't no air an' no life of any kind up there. Then there was some 'oo said as 'ow we should never 'ave let the Jerries send a ship. An' there was plenty as said as 'ow Joe meant ter grab all o' the moon for the Russians. There might be big mines o' this stuff called uranium—an' 'ooever 'ad that 'd 'ave the world. Yair . . . *an'* the stars.

"An' so we was all dreadin' that we'd 'ave another war on our 'ands afore we knew where we was. Ev'rybody was diggin' deep shelters an' learnin' first aid—an' in ev'ry country they was gettin' out the war rockets, settin' 'em up so as one little gent with a push of 'is finger could blitz a city 'arf the world away. An' they 'ad other gadgets, too. Things wot could see the rockets comin' long afore you or me could, that'd send other rockets up ter meet 'em. But the rockets wot *did* come they come too fast.

"If they meant ter 'it Sydney—which I think they did—their aim wasn't too clever. A good two 'undred mile wide they must 'a' been—but even then it was bad enough. One moment a fine, quiet Sunday mornin'—an' then scorchin' light, screamin' fire an' all the thunders o' Judgment Day. Years later, it seemed, there was the shriekin' people trapped in the blazin' ruins, the smoulderin' corpses in the street—an' over all the sickenin' stink o' burnt meat. . . . It must 'a' been the same in all the other cities—except the lucky ones wot got a direct 'it.

"Our people didn't know 'oo done it—but they loosed off the war rockets just the same. Some they sent to Tokyo, some to Berlin. An' Moscow. They even say as 'ow some silly fools fired one at Melbourne. But they was all too late. . . .

It must 'a' been a day or two later that we—wot was left of us—saw the rocket comin' down. It wasn't a war rocket, it was one o' the big 'uns like we sent ter the moon. An, she wasn't comin' down on 'er jets—she was driftin' in slow an' careful like under 'er parachute. Ben Davis—'im wot was killed in the Risin'—'ad a launch wot was still workin'; it was afore they smashed the machines. An' 'im an me an' a coupla others went out ter meet 'er. She come down just off the 'eads, an' as we crept up to 'er through the stinkin' mess o' dead fish we could see the name on 'er side—*Southern Cross*. The bright metal was all tarnished an' battered, an' someone 'ad been weldin' on rough patches. But wot I was mainly wonderin' was wot 'er navigator'd say when 'e 'eard about 'is shelia.

"The last I seen of *'er* she was lyin' in Martin Place along o' all the others. I'm sure it *was* 'er—she musta 'idden 'er face in 'er 'ands—it wasn't charred very much. . . .

"Well, old Ben 'e brought 'is launch alongside the rocket. We could see a joker inside the green'ouse in the nose—an' when 'e saw us 'e come down an' opened

(Continued on page 129)

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

ED MORRELL: "THE STAR ROVER"

Dear Editor:

Several years ago a hawk faced man, with a keen and virile manner that gave a lie to his old age, reappeared in California after the story that had once rocked the state had long been forgotten. He was Ed Morrell. If we think of Jesse James and the Dalton boys, and other pre-automobile bandits, here in Ed Morrell we find, indeed, the last of the race.

Gene Fowler, the writer, met Morrell and liked him, found that he wanted to go into the mountains where he had been chased in one of the biggest man-hunts in history. Along with newspaper pals, Fowler backed the old fellow; at one time he thought of writing his life.

It had started in the late Eighties, that struggle between the railroad, The Octopus, and the settlers along the right of way. Through grants from Washington, and new state laws, the railroad could seize land and oust settlers. The railroad had power, influence. The poor folks had naught but anger, hot resentment. Riots, minor fights. There followed a chain of railroad hold-ups. The names of John Sontag and Chris Evans were spread on reward notices.

Then came the hold-up that shocked, on Feb. 22, 1889, when an innocent passenger was killed. Rewards grew to $10,000 for a bandit, dead or alive. At last the law closed in. In a gun fight at Stone Carrol, Sontag was badly wounded, and soon died. Evans was taken to a hospital; he lost an eye and an arm. Patched up, he was put in a cell in the Fresno County jail.

At this point Ed Morrell stepped into the picture. But let him tell it as he once related it to me.

"I was a young fellow at the time, and like all the people, felt intense sympathy for the bandits—only, I thought of them as men fighting for the good of everybody against evil power. Evans seemed like a modern Robin Hood, and when I heard that he was to be moved to the Fresno County jail I thought, Here's my chance. For I was doing odd jobs there. I was a kinda extra turnkey and when I met Evans I admired him even more. Well, I got me a revolver, held up the jailer, took his keys from him, let Evans loose, joined him, stole a couple of hosses, and we were off into the hills.

"Aiding a prisoner, that was bad enough, of course, but, outside, I had a misfortune that meant life for me in stir. For I had run into City Marshal John Morgan, and in the exchange of shots I wounded him.

"I tried to tell of the chase in the mountains in that little book I wrote 'The 25th Man', and it was something, and we couldn't have kept on the run so successfully, except for the fact that the people of California were on our side. They fed us and hid us, sent the hundreds of law hounds on wrong trails. Though Evans wasn't in good shape physically, he had a deal in his favor in this kind of a hunt, for he had been an Army scout and lived in the hills in the early days and he knew hideouts only known to the Indians.

"Of course I knew—he knew—that it was only a matter of time, and they finally ran us down at Visalia. We didn't even have money for lawyers, and that is a strange thing. Of the fortunes in money Sontag and Evans had taken, it was Sontag who hid the loot, and it has never been found. There is a fortune hidden in a cave—that was all Evans would say—a cave somewhere in the mountains. Even with lawyers I guess we wouldn't have done any better; we were both given sentences of life. Evans was finally pardoned, but he didn't live long afterward.

"I was sent to San Quentin, and into what

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proved to be hell for him. A certain forger was trying to get the parole board to let him out, and he wanted to curry favor—so he said that guns and ammunition, and enough dynamite to blow up the prison had been smuggled in—and that I was the ringleader and knew all about the plot I had started from inside, using some of the money that Evans had told me about and that pals outside had laid their hands on. The old story of the loot showing up hit the newspapers—and the headlines said: "Dynamite Jail Break Planned." You can imagine the spot I was on; I said in vain that it was all a lie, that I didn't know anything about guns or ammunition or dynamite.

"The warden shook his head. First he had the pen searched as it had never been searched before, to no avail, and then he decided to break me—so that I would talk. I'd have talked, if I could, all right, for no man in this country was ever so tortured by so many days and nights, without a let-up, in solitary confinement and in a strait-jacket.

"They nearly killed me, but before they'd stopped the strait-jacket torture, I thought of a way out for an escape. I concentrated on allowing my body to die—little by little—starting with the toes, and working up to the brain.

"When I got out, a learned professor told me that, unconsciously, I had been doing something like the trick done by holy ones in India. Well, after the entire body had been made the same as dead to me, without the slightest feeling, I could feel myself standing over my own body, looking down at it with pity. And then I went through the walls, out from the prison, and into the blessed freedom of the world.

"I believe had they come to try and awaken me before I returned, it would have killed me outright.

"Now, here is the strangest part of it—this happening once or many times. It might have been dreams, and I admit I have no proof. But while I had escaped in spirit I visited places and saw people I had never seen before—and I saw both the same places and the same people after I was physically released from prison.

"What turned the tide was that the forger, out on parole, boasted of the trick he had played on the parole board. As a result, I was taken from solitary and saw that damned strait-jacket for the last time—on myself—but I used it again, many times, waving it before crowds at lectures and exposing the brutality of the prison system. But back to stir—there, I became head of the prison trustees—and the job wasn't bad—but there seemed little chance of ever beating the life rap until Governor George W. P. Hunt of Arizona became interested in my case.

"Governor Hunt had become a student of capital punishment and prisoners in his own state, and then he began traveling throughout the entire West studying various state institutions. When he came to San Quentin, Hunt asked to see me, and the warden couldn't very well refuse. I found the governor most absorbed in the welfare of the prisoners, who, in those days, weren't supposed to be human beings. It was through this friend of mine, to be, that the Governor of California pardoned me.

"But Governor Hunt wasn't through—and neither was I through: the reform was only beginning, the reform that ended with the banishment forever of the leg-iron, the strait-jacket, and other relics of the Middle Ages. I lectured up and down the country, waving a bloody strait-jacket—until people became ashamed and action began to be taken about torture of fellow men.

"It was about that time that I first met Jack London. I had never before spoken to anyone about my spirit escape, from jail, for I was a little afraid that I might be laughed at—and no man likes ridicule. But one day, at Jack's home, I told him how, by degrees, I managed to free myself from the strait-jacket.

"Jack was all interest. He asked me about every detail, just how I went about it, and then we went through the process—which I had neglected to do—of checking up places I had seen, and people, too, on the outside, that I hadn't known anything about before going to jail, and finding if they tallied. They did—and Jack became very interested. He wanted to use my experiences, and all, for a great prison novel, even use my name, which he did, in his last novel, called 'The Star Rover'.

"The first third of the novel, with my prison experiences, is all true stuff—aside from the character of the man supposed to be telling the yarn—but Jack London, after accepting my version of the spirit escape, wasn't satisfied with it. Or rather, it went well as a means to develop a belief he had, those days, and that was in reincarnation.

"So, in 'The Star Rover' every time the prisoner makes a spirit escape, instead of just leaving the prison, as I did, he went back into a previous life or incarnation—and so the main part of the novel was on reincarnation. I think it might have been better had Jack stuck to the first part, straight prison stuff, the best ever written."

Ed changed the subject to answer about Evans; the poor guy had been pardoned in 1911 and died in 1917, a shadow of his former self.

"Gee," went on Morrell, "when I think of that treasure Sontag hid away! I'm going to go through those hills again and take a look for it."

Well, a few years ago Ed Morrell did come back to the California hills and he did linger in them through the bounty of friends. But, so far as is known, he had not found the "S. P. Loot," as it was called, up to the time he died, a very old man, but with still the spirit of a hawk, not very many months ago in Los Angeles.

I wonder if on his tombstone will be inscribed: *Ed Morrell—Last of the Outlaws—Friend of Jack London.* Or wouldn't it be better just: *Ed Morrell—A Friend of Man!*

JOHN WILSTACH.

ABOUT GEORGE WHITLEY

We read in a new British publication, *Fantasy Review*, Feb.-Mar. 1947, 15 Shere Rd., Il-

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ford, Essex, some interesting biographical facts about our author, George Whitley, author of "Boomerang", who also writes under the name of A. Bertram Chandler. We, by the way, were informed by Whitley's agent, at the time when we acquired the first story by Whitley for F.F.M. ("And Not In Peace"), that our author was on the high seas, making transatlantic trips as a British Merchant Navy officer.

"Raised in Beccles, Suffolk, he left school to start his education as apprentice to a tramp steamer line, which gave him a glimpse of most of the seven seas and some of the world's most colourful ports. By the time he had risen to second mate he had had his fill of tramps, and worked a spell ashore until he joined Shaw Savill Lines as Fourth Officer in '37, to collect more local colour on regular voyages to and from Australasia.

"War came, and with it the task of keeping Britain's larder stocked with provender from New Zealand and U.S.A. More often than not, his ship was west-bound—which meant that New York became the second home of Second Officer Chandler, whose off-watch hours were divided between studying his beloved navigation and reading and writing science fiction.

"He had always had a yen to write as well as roam, and had some light verse and humorous pieces in *Nautical Magazine*. And an appetite for fantasy, instilled in childhood by reading Verne, Wells and Lester Bidston, reawakened by the old *Amazing* (and other leading pulp magazines) naturally led to the urge to write science fiction."

THE EDITORS.

A GOOD FRIEND

I think the cover for "Allan and the Ice-Gods" is one of the most effective F.F.M. has had in some time. It indicates, instantly, to the purchaser, the fantastic theme.

Of course for me, who lent you the book, to praise "Allan and the Ice-Gods" is rather like the cook praising his own concoction, but I've always felt it a grand story—another example of Haggard's versatility—for not only was he a master of phrase and suspense, but, also, a master of variety.

As usual, I've read the letter section of the new F.F.M., and, from these, it would seem that there is quite a demand to use some of the more out-and-out fantastic, rather than the supernatural stories. I like both kinds. Of course, no selection, in F.F.M., can ever please everybody, and it's my opinion that the very fact that readers write in and suggest—yes, complain!—is really a sign of healthy interest in the magazine. All in all, the editor and publisher of F.F.M. have every right to be proud of it—often a magazine has "good issues"—but F.F.M. has consistently maintained its quality —issue after issue—year after year!

I'm glad to see the wide-spread approval of F.F.M.'s illustrations. The magazine, as I see it, leads all others, in the field, in pictures.

THYRIL L. LADD.

33 Cuyler Ave.,
Albany 2, N.Y.

H. RIDER HAGGARD ENTHUSIAST

I'm glad to see you bringing us some of the better H. Rider Haggard stories. I wish, however, that you might present some of his older, scarcer titles. "The Ghost Kings" is one I've wanted to read for years, but haven't been able to find.

I was glad to see Finlay back in the pages of F.F.M. In some respects Lawrence is better than Virgil, while in other things Finlay is tops.

By the way, I've been hearing rumors that a new fan publishing outfit has issued "Spacehounds of IPC" by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., and "The Legion of Space" by Jack Williamson in book form. Can you give me any information about this?

Keep up the good work with F.F.M.

THEODORE ENGEL.

1660 Sheephead Bay Road,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Editor's Note: The information you want can be had from Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, P. O. Box 159, Reading, Pa., who is an authority on these authors.

F.F.M. NEWLY DISCOVERED

I am, much to my regret, a comparatively new reader of F.F.M., but will never miss any future issues of your fine publication as long as I have the price and you maintain the high quality that distinguishes it at present.

Words of praise from me would, no doubt, be superfluous, but I must congratulate you on the happy combination of splendid stories and expert illustrating that together operate to place F.F.M. in a class by itself. There is little danger of a poor story appearing in the magazine as long as you continue your present policy of selection, but indifferent illustrating would detract heavily from the best story ever written.

Such criticism as I have to offer is soon stated, and I submit it because I know you are as much interested in such comment as you are in words of praise. I would like to see F.F.M. printed on better quality paper that would not turn yellow and become brittle in a few years. I'd like to see more variation in the style of cover illustration, which for months has featured skulls and other sections of the human skeleton. Another improvement, in my opinion, would be to run the feature story straight through to its conclusion instead of continuing it in scattered columns among the advertising at the end of the magazine. This change would make it possible to bind these stories for better preservation.

A few of your readers have asked for stories featuring science. I am decidedly against the idea. Others want the magazine issued monthly. Fine, if quality of content and illustration can be maintained. Otherwise, no!

For the benefit of those readers who would like to secure stories by Sir Rider Haggard, I have a great many books by that author in my library that I will exchange for back numbers of F.F.M. I will promptly reply to all correspondence on the subject.

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I buy two extra copies of F.F.M. each time it appears, and pass them on to friends who are not acquainted with it. Let me recommend this plan to other readers. The investment is so small as to be almost trifling and it pays big dividends in gratitude and good will from those who are thus introduced to a very interesting publication.

Thanking you for many hours of pleasure derived from your magazine, both in the past and in days to come.

J. P. GUINON.

P. O. Box 214,
Little Rock, Ark.

A RECORD?

Have I the world's most extensive collection of "The King in Yellow"? I wonder. I have *twelve different editions* of this Robert Chambers volume. Does any F.F.M. reader have more? Or do any of you have an edition you think I may not? Let me hear from you. I have the first, of course, and the Memorial, and 10 in between, including an Australian with cover jacket. Could use wrappers for a number of the others, though, if they ever had them. Also have a highly interesting variant, "The Mask", a separate printing with 5 tales from "The King in Yellow." The outstanding part about this copy is that it was originally the property of H. P. Lovecraft. In the story "The Yellow Sign", HPL took a pencil and underlined each appearance of *The Yellow Sign, The King in Yellow, The Pallid Mask, Hastur, Cassilda and the Hyades.*

By the way, this may be of interest to book collectors in the crowd: If all goes well, I shall be spending several weeks in England the latter part of September. I intend to make a fine-tooth comb my primary piece of luggage, for ferreting out all the treasure tomes in the British bookshops! I shall be particularly interested in such authors as Stapledon, Machen, Onions, Burrage, Dunsany, Wright, Wakefield, James, Wells, Benson, LeFanu, Blackwood and similar ones who abound in England. All fantastic fans who are interested in discussing this projected pilgrimage, write, and please send enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope for my reply to you.

FORREST J ACKERMAN.

236½ N. New Hampshire,
Hollywood 4, Cal.

THE TEN BEST?

For nearly seven years I have read F.F.M. without saying one word.

Today I gathered from their cherished places of repose all of my file (of which I lack the first few issues, and all of 1945 which I missed while overseas, the latter of which more anon) and went back over them, meeting again old friends, seeing once more the half forgot strange lands, some beautiful, some peopled with horror. I compiled a list of them, and following are the ten best with comments:

1. "Ark of Fire", by John Hawkins. Their toast "May you live forever and I never die" lingers yet in my mind. That is the best way I can describe my liking for the story. Sad, somehow haunting, it is a classic that can not be equaled.

2. "The Star Rover", by Jack London. A little like his "Before Adam", yet much better, the wording more beautiful. Jack London was, remains, one of the Masters. His works are always welcome with me.

3. "The Man Who Was Thursday", by G. K. Chesterton. A book that, once read, must be read again and again before it can be fully understood. An immortal fantasy.

4. "The Citadel of Fear", by Francis Stevens. Ah, Quetzalcoatl, Lord of the Air; 'a heathen god, but a stanch friend.' To no other story would I rather have seen a sequel. I wonder if Stevens intended that by the way in which he finished the story.

5. "The Face in the Abyss", by A. Merritt. I liked "Ship of Ishtar" much better, but as you never published it the "Face" ranks higher than—

6. "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and "Creep, Shadow!" which are both so good I cannot put one above the other.

7. "Before the Dawn", by John Taine. Surely such a main character as Belshazzar, brute in a world before man, was never conceived. You should bring Taine back again.

8. "The Undying Monster", by Jessie Kerruish. Plot and suspense excellent. Characters not quite right, spoiled the story somehow.

9. "Polaris—of the Snows", by Charles B. Stilson. How I would liked to have read the rest of that trilogy!

10. "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" trilogy, by J. U. Giesy.

So now to the complaints. The short stories are on the downgrade. Chamber's "Passeur" is the only decent short you have featured for some time. Also I think we have had enough of the Beginnings and Endings of the World for a while. "The Twenty-Fifth Hour" I may finish on that same hour! "Unthinkable"—never!

How is it that you, and the readers, have missed such a gem as Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger"? Here is a pure fantasy, little known, and as far as I know, out of print long ago. What a symbolic cover Lawrence could make for this, and Finlay would have no barriers for his wandering imagination for the interior. Why not put this before your readers and get their opinions? Though I myself have the book, still I would fain see it again with Finlay and Lawrence.

Can I get those 1945 issues from some of my fellow readers?

Thus will I close now, and in my own humble manner thank you for those tales which, perhaps twenty years from now, will be unpriceable.

PHILIP GRAY.

R. F. D. 1,
Ellsworth Falls, Maine

FANTASY QUERY

Dear Editor:

I have long been an ardent admirer of F.F.M. As a fantasy addict, I would like to know if

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you can direct me to an outfit which is rumored to also purvey some better Fantasy. I believe it is called Trover Hall, but so far I have been unable to locate it.

TED TREADWELL.

Editor's Note: We recently received the following information, which may be of use to you.

Trover Hall will publish only science fiction and fantasy, and represents the first book publishing house to deal exclusively in original material of this nature. Because of its small and selective natural audience, established publishing houses have not had the courage to enter the field to any great degree. Except for a few excellent reprint anthologies, and a few rare novels (many of which F.F.M. is publishing), such material in the field as has been published in book form has seldom measured up to the high standards set by such magazines as F.F.M. Therefore Trover Hall pledges itself to attempt to fill this obvious gap in modern American literature and publishing.

In our investigation of the field we have found a promising author, Anthony More, whose short stories indicate unusual versatility, imagination, and grasp of the fantasy atmosphere. We have selected six of these as our initial publication, bound under the title of "Puzzle Box." Our next publication is to be a long science fiction novel, and among projected plans is a *Who's Who* of Fantasy and Science Fiction authors, artists, editors, and publishers. Incidentally, any help from those interested in fantasy, in carrying out this latter project, would be appreciated.

Anyone seeking further information is urged to contact Edwin M. Clinton, Jr., Managing Editor, Trover Hall, 2126 Grove St., San Francisco 17, Calif.

FINLAY AND LAWRENCE FINE

The April issue of F.F.M. was the best yet.

"Allan and the Ice-Gods" by H. Rider Haggard was one of the finest stories in F.F.M. since I started reading it a little over a year ago.

I am an avid reader of Rider Haggard stories, having read nearly all of his better novels. So it was a great thrill to find "Allan and the Ice-Gods" in your excellent April Issue.

The illustrations by Finlay and Lawrence were very good, including the fine cover illustration by Lawrence.

If anyone is interested in discussing books, authors, scientifiction and the like, I would be delighted to hear from you, promising to answer all letters.

JACK DOHERTY.

68 Latimer Ave.,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

MORE HAGGARD, PLEASE!

I have been a reader of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* for the past three years, and I have enjoyed every issue that I have read. I like the full length novels better than the short stories, because in a novel an author has a much better opportunity to express his ideas. It pleased me very much when you published the stories by H. Rider Haggard, and I enjoyed reading them again after all these years. More Haggard, please!

I especially liked "The Machine Stops," "The Island of Dr. Moreau," "The Twenty-fifth Hour," and "Before the Dawn." I like John Taine very much and would like to read more of his stories.

The illustrations in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* are always very good. I read several other fantasy magazines too, but F.F.M. certainly has them all beat for art work! Lawrence may have been pinch hitting, as some fans say, for Finlay, but in my opinion he is every bit as good. Lawrence always turns out fine work, but I have noticed that Finlay gets careless at times. Finlay did a superb cover for "The Star Rover."

For a suggestion—why not use "Useless Hands" by Claude Farrère? I read that a long time ago and could hardly put the book down till I had finished it.

I wonder if any of your readers could help me to get a copy of "The Mislaid Charm" by A. M. Phillips? I have read several stories by Mr. Phillips, and he is one of my favorite authors. I have heard a great deal about this story from my friends, but have never been able to find it except at exhorbitant prices that I cannot afford. I think that you should try to get some of Mr. Phillips' stories for F.F.M. as they are very well written and are very interesting. I have heard rumors that "The Mislaid Charm" is to be published as a book by someone in New York, or Philadelphia, I don't know which. This is very interesting if it is true, for it is a real classic.

SAM MORRIS.

P. O. Box 54,
Darby Rd., Paoli, Penna.

Editor's Note: Mr. Oswald Train of 3507 N. Suydenham St., Philadelphia 40, Pa., knows a lot about publishing in his home city. You might get information through him.

LIKED RONALD CLYNE'S PICTURE

This'll be the first time that I've written to F.F.M. I've been a reader ever since the September, '45 issue, and lately I've been collecting older copies. (Incidentally, I'm in the market for any F.F.M.'s before December, '45, so if any fan has some extra copies and would like to get rid of them, just let me know.) Your mag has been a great help to me in getting acquainted with the older fantasy writers, which otherwise I wouldn't have had much of a chance to read.

"Allan and the Ice-Gods" was one of the best stories you've published to date. I sincerely hope that you'll continue this series of Haggard's stories. I liked "The Ancient Allan" very much, and since I haven't read any other of Haggard's stories besides "She", I hope to obtain, as it were, a course in his writings. The character of Wi was very well done, and so were Aaka, Pag, Henga, etc., etc. I followed the whole story right through to the part where

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the group was about to land on Laleela's homeland, and then—of all the dirty tricks to play on a reader!! Leaving off right at the most important moment, and not letting anyone know whether they reached the land. In a sense, the whole story had built up to this, for, as Good said in the story, Wi was much more advanced than his people, and in time, they, being primitives, would have disagreed with him and quite possibly deposed him as chief. (Although they might have understood his wisdom more fully, and could have made him some sort of god, after his death.) But the whole thing is a rather trite question to argue over.

There was nothing much to the shorts. "Passeur" seemed to be pretty pointless to me. "The Prisoner in Time" was merely second rate science-fiction. I'd like to see more stf in F.F.M.; quite a few of your readers have been hollering for Edgar Rice Burroughs. Also some of John Taine's stories would be good. And what about Olaf Stapeldon?

The cover was okay this issue, although I don't particularly care for symbolism. I think you could use the cover to better advantage by using it to illustrate some high spot of the story, such as Wi's killing of the tiger, his fight with Henga, or any one of a dozen other interesting incidents. These would be, I'm sure, much more appreciated by your readers. The inside art was good, although Finlay was not up to his usual standard. The best ilustration was the one on page 37. Lawrence's pic on page 111 was not particularly clear. I liked Ronald Clyne's pic for "Prisoner in Time". I wish he could do some of the pics for the lead stories once in a while. He has a style that is interesting and refreshing.

I do wish you could go monthly; I get sorta impatient waiting around, as I know that I can nearly always find a high quality story in any issue of F.F.M.

GUERRY BROWN.

P. O. Box 1467,
Deray Beach, Florida.

LIKED "ALLAN STORY"

I have just finished reading "Allan and the Ice-Gods" and I enjoyed it very much. Most of your stories lately have been very good but I don't think that you have been using stories that are too hard for the reader to secure in other forms. Surely there are many difficult to find items that you could print. Namely the novels of such writers as Sheridan le Fanu, Algernon Blackwood, M. P. Shiel, G. P. Serviss, and scarce Taine stories like "The Seeds of Life", etc.

I have over 2,000 Fantasy books and magazines disposable. Included are F.F.M., F.N., and most other titles. I have no lists, but I will check want lists sent to me.

CLAUDE HELD.

372 Dodge St.,
Buffalo 8, N. Y.

HAGGARD: A MASTER OF FANTASY

In the first place, I must say this. I am a railroader and as such I do, and like to, travel. Am just back home, from the greatest journey of my whole life. Why, yes, you guessed right! Am freshly back from that journey in the dawn of mankind, with Allan and Good, and as they so aptly say, we could talk all night and all of tomorrow of that priceless story, and of the events and theories involved.

I like to read the Amazing sort of stories, as it affords a relief from the every-day routine, and that's about all the good it gives one; but with Brother H. Rider Haggard, it's completely different, any angles you choose to look at it from. First, the effect of Taduki is permeating not Allan alone and his pal Good, but also the reader. One lives with the characters of the story, and for eight solid hours I was one of that tribe, or as Wi said, one of the people. Second: the type of story is very instructive as it opens up a little peephole in which we can witness events that took place eons of ages ago, but was only yesterday in the history of our planet. Third: Rider's style is unique, the wording is elegant, rich, distinctive, and readily comprehensible to everyone. Fourth: the advanced theory, of being re-born (fantastic as it seems), has support in many instances; otherwise, explain this: you meet in a near, or far-away place, a person you never saw, or met, or even dreamed about, and that person strikes you as if you had met him or her somewhere, sometime, and immediately you feel as if you are old acquaintances. This for just one example! So I do not say that I personally accept the theory, but I certainly do not reject it!

So on this story, F.F.M. Editors, please do accept my most sincere compliments for "Allan & the Ice Gods;" although that story does not require compliments, it is a compliment in itself. Only twelve bundles of Taduki remain now; how about another trip into the past in the near future? Yes, how about it?

Am afraid I'm taking a bit too much of your time, and I hate to do so. But I trust that you'll be indulgent. I'll be looking forward to another treat of Taduki, with Allan, and Lady Ragnall.

The illustrations by Virgil Finlay are simply grand, and I mean grand.

GEORGE CARETTE.

2231 Second Ave.,
Trois-Rivieres,
P. Quebec, Canada

MAX BRAND FAN

All I'm hoping is that you'll manage to squeeze this letter of mine into your Readers' Viewpoint in the next issue of F.F.M. But maybe you'll turn me down when I confess that actually I'm not a true dyed in the wool fantasy fan. My tastes in this field are pretty well limited to one type of story—the macabre, or the weird tale. I'm the kind of guy who enjoys a man-sized set of goosepimples. Give me a thunderstorm, an old house and a beady-eyed something scampering across the floor in the dead of night and I'm satisfied. I can well do without rocketing to Mars for a spot of lunch or emptying my newest space gun at some devilish character with three noses! Nope, I'd be much happier taking a trip into "The Wil-

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lows" with Algernon Blackwood, or shaking hands with William Harvey's "Beast with Five Fingers"!

I happened to be browsing through a downtown bookstore here in Kansas City and on impulse bought a copy of F.F.M. Dated February 1947. In it I found I had been missing a good deal. Not only did W. James Wintle's "Spectre Spiders" give me a delightful chill but I was surprised at the high quality of your whole magazine. The art work is outstanding and worthy of much praise. Your comments from readers interested me a great deal also and I decided, right then and there, to write you.

You can help me on another matter if you will. I'm trying to contact any fans interested in the work of Frederick Faust, or as he is better known, Max Brand. Some of your readers may recall "John Ovington Returns" (F.F.M. June 1941) and "The Lost Garden" (F.F.M. December 1941). The former was actually the first story of *any type* Faust sold to a magazine. (Bob Davis bought it for the old *All-Story*.) However, as everyone knows, the name of Max Brand later became famous for Westerns, and not one in a thousand readers will remember his excellent fantasy work. I have those two short stories mentioned above, along with his "Receding Brow," a novelette, and a serial called "Smoking Land". They are both fantasies. The only remaining fantasy I need by Max Brand is a novelette entitled "Devil Ritter" which appeared in the July 13, 1918 issue of the old *All-Story*. My slim hope is that some of your readers will be of help in locating this. For the past four years Faust has been my chief hobby (aside from Weird fiction) in the collecting field. I have 105 of his books with over 100 of his complete magazine stories. My main boast is that I know more of his *life* than any other individual in the nation, and that's backed up by the fact that My "Faust Notebook" contains every article, picture, note or book-report I've been able to lay hands on. And my Faust letter file is equally as large with letters from such well known authors as Frank O'Rourke, Steve Fisher, and Frank Gruber who all were personal friends of "Max Brand".

So, all this will give you some idea of why I'd like to complete Faust in the "Fantasy" line and with your help in printing my letter I may, after all, accomplish just that. I will welcome letters from any and all of your readers who like the work of Faust (he wrote under no less than eighteen pseudonyms) even though they cannot supply "Devil Ritter." They may be of help to me in other degrees. Anyhow, come on you "Max Brand", "George Challis", "Evan Evans", "Faust" lovers, write to

BILL NOLAN.

3337 Forest,
Kansas City 3, Mo.

P.S. Many many thanks to F.F.M.—and keep up that high standard. You lead the field all the way! Incidentally, I'm at present tracking down a rumor that Faust and A. Merritt were planning on doing the "Fox Woman" *together* but that things didn't work out that way and Faust dropped out. They were good friends!

BOUQUET

I have copies of Astounding Science Fiction for September, 1937, October 1939, November, 1941, July 1942, August 1944, December 1944, and August, 1945, one Amazing Stories quarterly for October 1929, a small pamphlet with a collection of science-fiction and fantasy stories, and the book, "Best Supernatural Stories of H. P. Lovecraft." One of each, first come, first served.

In Famous Fantastic Mysteries you have one of the two really worth-while fantasy and science-fiction mags on the market. Keep it up. Can you get any more of Lord Dunsany's short stories? He's really a master. And so, of course, is H. Rider Haggard. The recent "Allan and the Ice-Gods" came up to all my anticipations of it. You could print an "Allan" story every issue, and I wouldn't mind a bit. Go a little easy on the horror stuff, though.

MARGARET MCINTYRE.

Box 192,
Isanti, Minn.

BRICKBAT

For a moment of relaxation, I sat down and read V. E. Thiessen's "Prisoner of Time."

Gr-r!

It had even less literary quality than that unmentionable "Heaven Only Knows" of Archibald.

Let's go at this logically though. First of all it was obvious—a man named "Bard" being a playwright—one immediately suspects the worst, the worst, of course, being realized eventually.

Second: the use of the name "Merritt" as an attempt by the author to ingratiate himself with fantasy fans reading the story was cheap and dishonest. Had the story some sincerity at least, he might have been forgiven—but it was obviously not sincere.

Next: of all the improbable, asinine ideas, Thiessen's takes the cake. For his information, I assure him that enough is known of Shakespeare's early days to assure us of his English ancestry. Any standard text of Shakespeare's life will do. I know that this story is fantasy, but even fantasy must first persuade the reader that "such things can happen." That is the reason for A. Merritt's success—the life and warmth he infused into his stories. Thiessen's is a joke; "implausible" is far too mild an adjective.

And—speaking of jokes, the appearance of such trash as this can do immeasurable harm to the magazine. It can only draw laughs of satire, roundly deserved, too!

Continuing, the completely false and vacuous science-fiction atmosphere he injected into the story was ridiculous. Glance over it: (1) the gnarled twisted woman whom "science had kept alive long past her time to die," which is the last the "author" has to say about this remarkable scientific discovery; (2) "Toast of Lena"—an interplanetary air yet! (3) "a cruising taxiplane . . . foamy softness of the cushions". Doesn't it sound like one of those post-war ads which promise all sorts of gad-

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gets, etc.? (4) (Messer Speaking): "Take a week with the pleasure drug.". . . "You'll drive yourself to one of the psychocities."

Shades of "Brave New World"! I can see Huxley's words now about "taking soma until I'm in a coma." Why publish Thiessen's version? Use the original! It's a fine satire!

And placing this . . . ugh . . . story after Chambers' thoughtfully-written "Passeur" . . . most inconsiderate of you.

Please forgive me if this epistle sounds rude—I like the magazine and want it to maintain a good quality and ranking. Otherwise I would not have bothered writing at all. But please don't use such stuff as filler material.

Last of all—I have a request to make. I've never asked to have a letter printed, but if you could see it, I wish you'd use this diatribe of mine. Reasons? 1. The story deserves wrathful criticism. 2. It'll be a welcome change from some of my more gushing efforts. 3. I repeat—a bum yarn deserves harsh words. If the other fans do not feel as I do, I'll be extremely surprised! In fact—I'll take salt and pepper, and I'll *eat this* hamburger I'm holding. Tch, tch! I wouldn't like to eat this paper.

Still a friend,
Ben Indick

Box 240,
Rutgers University,
New Brunswick, N. J.

LIKED THIESSEN'S YARN

Your April issue brings to mind just oodles of conversational material, not all of it, I'm afraid complimentary.

OUCH! should be your reaction to the general tone of this issue's letter column. As far as I can see, readers are sick of: Weird covers, skeleton covers, symbolic illustrations, weird stories, adventure novels, short stories, long stories and the world in general. Methinks you'd better get a little variety into your features, if only for the sake of peace in "The Readers' Viewpoint."

Love that April cover. Hope it's the beginning of an alternation of same between Finlay and Lawrence. This last pair has been among the best two consecutive F. F. M. covers I've seen.

Anyway, Lawrence finally injected some color into his cover and has produced what is to my mind, his finest painting.

Unfortunately, the interior art situation is not so bright. Look at those horrible (you heard me!) pics for the novel; without a doubt the worst Finlays I've ever had the misfortune to gaze upon. And I thought the day would never come when I or any other fan would say that Virgil Finlay's work "stinks." Clyne had the only passable pic in the issue; you ruined what might have been the best, Lawrence's for "Passeur", by a poor print job, Excluding the cover, April 1947 was the hardest on the eyes of any issue in F. F. M.'s history.

"Allen and the Ice-gods" was a good novel, not up to its predecessor, perhaps, but certainly

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worth printing. That Wi-Aaka-Laleela triangle is as old as literature, though. Also, Haggard seems to have a fondness for dwarves as the hero's pal—witness Bes in "Ancient A." and Pag in this one. So did Merritt. The last chapter propounded some interesting ideas which showed considerable thought on the part of Haggard. (By the way, the story says that Wi wore a tiger skin; the fellow on the cover is clothed in a leopard pelt. Am I wrong?)

Chambers' "Passeur" was Passeuble (ahem) and V. E. Thiessen scores heavily with his outstanding "Prisoner in Time". New tales of this quality seem to prove that modern writers deserve more space in your magazine than they've been getting.

John Walsh.

154 North Main St.,
St. Albans, Vt.

NEW PLAN

The cover illustration—superb, the feature story—excellent, inside illustrations—good, short stories—satisfactory, Reader's Viewpoint—better than ever.

The above paragraph describes, in a nutshell, your April 1947 issue of F. F. M.

We definitely have started 1947 on the right track, First, "The Star Rover," followed by "Allan And The Ice-Gods." Now you promise for the next issue "People of the Ruins."

Ed Shanks' coming story sounds a great deal like H. G. Wells' "Things To Come"—theme, starvation, disease, rebellion, possible cannibalism, then finally reinstatement. It should satisfy the most particular fan.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank F. F. M. for printing my former letter, which carried my plea for aid in retrieving issues of F. F. M. At long last my ship came in to the tune of six copies of said mag. for 1939 and 1940. These issues contain such classics as Merritt's "Conquest of the Moon Pool" and "Face in the Abyss" and Serviss' "The Moon Metal", to mention only a few. I have some great reading to look forward to for the next few weeks.

Has anyone in their possession the issue of F. F. M. containing Haggard's "The Ancient Allan"? Drop me a line, if you have. I will gladly swap two or several Stf. mags for that particular copy.

Have noticed different opinions in the Readers' Viewpoint concerning the former stories that have appeared in F. F. M. For instance, one individual condemns Best's "The Twenty-Fifth Hour" while on the other hand the same story is praised to glory by the next in line; so to combat all this, with views of settling the matter once and for all, I have decided to introduce a "vote by mail" procedure.

Would like all fans to drop me a line stating, briefly, what they consider measures up to the standards as the top fantasy to appear in F. F. M. *since* February 1946, to date. Then I'll have the favourite yarn, voted by these fans, printed in the Readers' Viewpoint, (the title not the whole danged tale) if the Editor doesn't fill a

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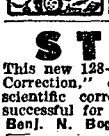

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corner of his waste paper bin with my epistle. This should settle the dispute, indefinitely of course. What do you all think?

Ere I go, may I point my professional, but skeptical finger in the somewhat dignified direction of the Readers' Viewpoint for the April issue, and select the three outstanding letters therein? First, Tony Raines' (for criticism), second, Joe Kennedy's (or Jake, as he is more widely known—for news) and last but far from least J. J. Stamp's (for nothing).

J. J. Stamp.

Norval, Ontario, Canada.

SUGGESTIONS

Glad to see Finlay back. How about another portfolio of *his* illustrations real soon? Keep Lawrence. He is very good. Suggestion: don't concentrate on "weirds" too much. Give us more like Taine's "Before the Dawn", "Phra", "The Ancient Allan" (am busy reading "A. and the Ice-Gods" in the current issue), yes, and even "Man Who Was Thursday." Whatta story. It left me doubting my own sanity.

I still have this hope: that you will change the name of the magazine to *Fantastic Novels* and use the title *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* for a companion magazine which would feature former magazine stories. You'd really be surprised at the demand for such a mag.

Robert R. Pattrick.

1435 N. Pacific Ave.,
Glendale, Zone 2, Calif.

"ALLAN" STORY A THRILL

I have been a reader of fantastic and science fiction for over twenty years now, in fact, ever since I saw a copy of the old *Amazing Stories* on a newsstand one day in 1926, and this type of fiction is still my favorite. I wish to congratulate you on publishing some of the mystery stories of H. Rider Haggard, whose books gave me a great deal of pleasure when I discovered them as a boy, and it was a real thrill to see his "Allan and the Ice-Gods", which I had not previously read, in the current issue of F. F. M.

Most of my acquaintance with the classics of fantasy has been through the medium of your magazine.

Perhaps some of your readers would be interested in an accumulation of science fiction and fantasy publications which I expect to dispose of shortly. They date back to 1934 and those which carry continued stories are mostly in complete years. Any inquiries will receive consideration and be answered.

John B. Warren.

2805 Montrose Ave.,
Richmond, Va.

CONGRATS TO LAWRENCE!

Purchased the April F. F. M. today, and couldn't throttle down the temptation to write and tell you what a beauty that cover is! My

(Continued on page 130)

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BOOMERANG

(Continued from page 118)

a door in the side. 'E was the only one left of 'er crew. An' 'ow 'e made it 'ome Gawd alone knows—'e was only 'arf a man. 'E was in a worse state than some o' the dead 'uns we'd been clearin' away all that mornin'.

"We got 'im ashore. Wot 'appened to the rocket we never see. I think she sunk. But we never looked back at 'er. By this time the book burnin' an' such had started—they was goin' inter any 'ouses wot was still standin' and bringin' out books an' throwin' 'em inter the flames of them as wasn't.

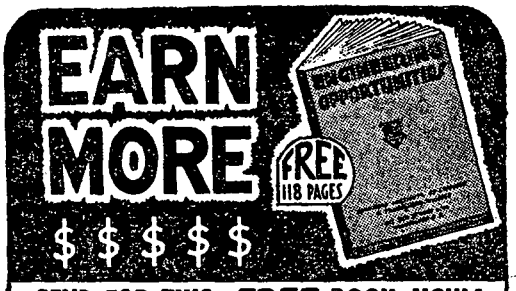
"An' there was some 'oo wanted ter throw 'im inter the fire along o' the books. But there was enough of us ter 'old off the mob until 'e finished 'is story. 'E died, then—so it didn't really much matter whot they did ter 'im. . . .

"All them rockets landed by the big 'ole in Tyko, 'e said. An' there was people up there—if yer can call things like octopussies, people. An' the first rocket the Russians sent—'er wot made the 'ole—played merry 'Ell wi' one o' their underground cities. They mighta laughed *that* off as accidental—but when all the rockets started comin' down all at once they thought it was invasion. . . ."

He picked up the boomerang, threw it in the direction of the moon, pale and remote, the first beachhead in Man's drive to interplanetary empire. The aboriginal toy spun lazily, seemed to hang suspended for an appreciable time, then returned to his outstretched hand.

"But wot *did* 'appen? Wot *did* 'appen, Granddad?"

"Can't yer see? They loaded all them rockets up wi' uranium—an' sent 'em back!"



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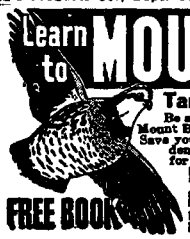

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FREE BOOK

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 128)

congrats to Lawrence; he's done a A 1 job. It's the best cover in all the last eight, even including the same artist's Skull design for the August 1946 issue. He even out-Finlayed Finlay with this one, and V. F. has long been my favorite.

Magnifique!

I've not had time to read the stories, but Haggard's tale looks good; Finlay's illuses excellent.

Looking over the Readers' Viewpoint (the best reader's section in *any* mag), I add my vote to that of T. Raines—"Unthinkable" was unthinkable. And this opinion is diametrically opposed to that of my own countryman, Mons. Stamp.

Must be a grim life, being an editor!

I'm going to write to some of the readers who offer back issue F. F. M.'s for trade, but I'd still like to have it known that I have some of the early issues of both mags to swap for Vol. 1 No. 5 of *Fantastic Novels*, and nearly all issues of F. F. M. between Feb. 1941 and Feb. 1946.

I have various other magazines to dispose of as well, but my prime object in life is the completion of my files of F. F. M. and F. N.

S. W. McCoy.

951 Harrison Ave.,
London, Ontario, Canada.

ENJOYED APRIL ISSUE

I just finished reading the April issue of F. F. M. which I enjoyed immensely. "Allan and the Ice-Gods" and "The Ancient Allan", by Haggard, have by far surpassed any other stories which you have printed recently. As for the shorts, "Passeur" was good but "Prisoner in Time" did not quite live up to F. F. M. standards. I have been reading F. F. M. for only two years now but am trying like mad to get the old back issues. If anyone has any old F. F. M.'s or any kind of old S. T. F. mags, I would like very much to hear from you.

Bob Raport.

5700 Rockhill Road,
Kansas City, Mo.

OUR ARTISTS EXCEL

Your staff of illustrators excel by far those of other mags in the fantasy and science-fiction field.

I find your stories, in the main, enjoyable and excellently written, although my taste runs toward science-fiction rather than fantasy.

Could you possibly see fit to publish E. R. Burrough's "The Moon Maid." I read this about fifteen years ago in book form and recall it as one of his finest efforts. I don't believe it has ever appeared in a magazine before.

Keep up the good work.

A. G. Jarrett, Jr.

131 Brucemont Circle,
W. Asheville, N. C.

Editor's Note: "The Moon Maid" was in a magazine.

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MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING-

(OR IS IT?)

BY GROUCHO MARX

WHAT do you want to save up a lot of money for? You'll never need the stuff.

Why, just think of all the wonderful, wonderful things you can do *without* money. Things like—well, things like—

On second thought, you'd better keep on saving, chum. Otherwise you're licked.

For instance, how are you ever going to build

that Little Dream House, without a trunk full of moolah? You think the carpenters are going to work free? Or the plumbers? Or the architects? Not those lads. They've been around. They're no dopes.

And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

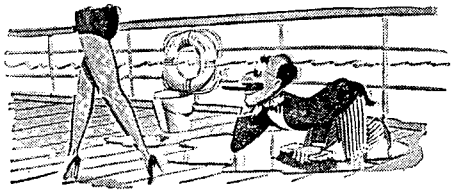
Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

So—all seriousness aside—you'd better keep on saving, pal.

Obviously the best way is by continuing to buy U. S. Savings Bonds—through the Payroll Plan.



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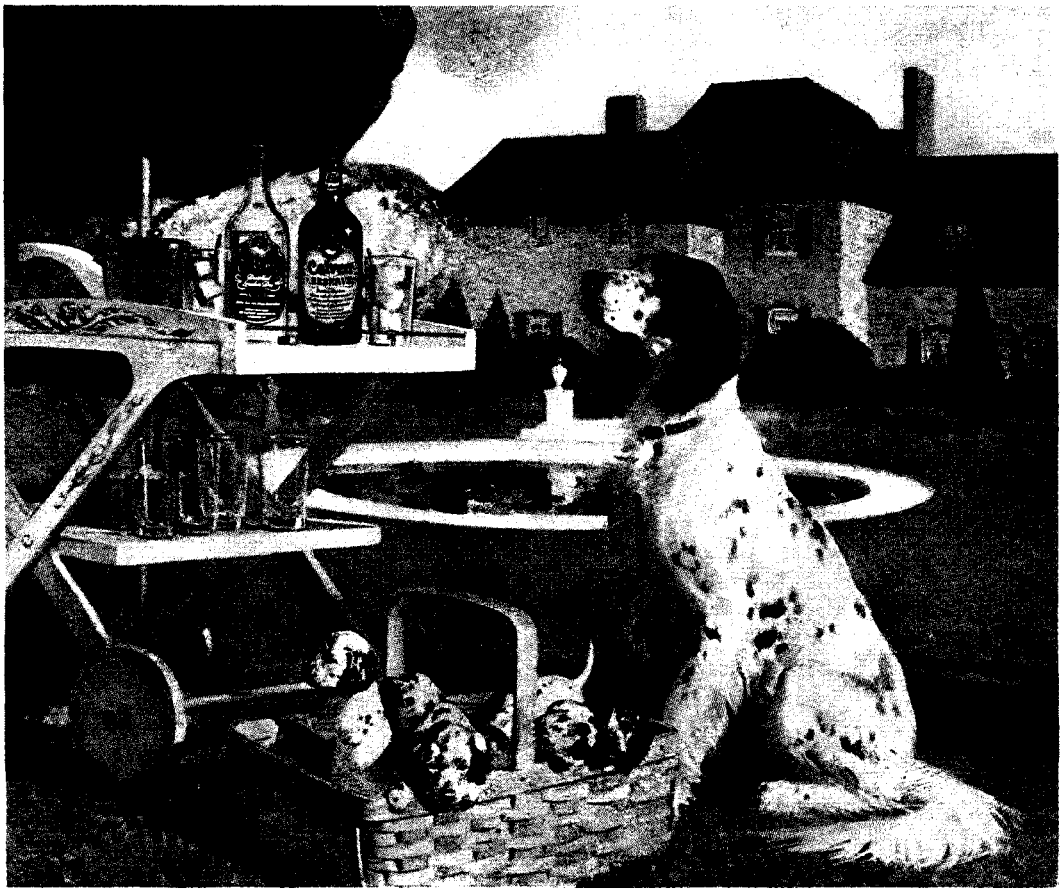

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